



A Midsummer Night's Dream

Imagine an aristocratic wedding in a grand English country house. Imagine that after the solemnities and the wedding supper, the newlyweds and their distinguished guests—including the most distinguished guest of all, Queen Elizabeth I—are treated to a private entertainment, a play written specially for them. The play is Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a comedy that culminates not only in three marriages but in a play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, performed for the newlyweds with delicious incompetence by well-meaning, hopelessly bumbling artisans. Their inept performance amuses the happy couples and helps to "wear away this long age of three hours," as the amorously impatient Duke Theseus puts it, "between our after-supper and bed-time" (5.1.33–34). At the end of the play-within-the-play, the stage brides and grooms exit to consummate their marriages—"Sweet friends, to bed"—and so too, we imagine, amid the blessings and sly jokes of their guests, the real newlyweds retire to bed.

Scholars have told and retold this story of the aristocratic wedding for which Shakespeare wrote his most enchanting comedy until it has come to seem like an established truth, one of the few things we actually know about the composition of the plays. But while the story is both charming and at least plausible, there is not a shred of actual evidence that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was ever performed at, let alone written expressly for, such a wedding. What we do know is that this play was performed on the London stage: the title page of the First Quarto says that it "hath been sundry times publicly acted" by the Lord Chamberlain's Men and that it was written by William Shakespeare.

The precise date that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written and first performed is unknown; the Elizabethan writer Francis Meres mentions it admiringly in 1598, and certain of its stylistic features have led many scholars to place it around 1594–96, the probable period of the comparably lyrical *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*. Attempts to find more precise coordinates by locating an allusion to a particular Royal Progress in Oberon's lines about the "fair vestal thronèd by the west" (2.1.158) or to a particular wet season in Titania's lines about the miserable weather (2.1.88ff.) have been defeated by the frequency of both Queen Elizabeth's travels and English rainstorms.

What accounts, then, for all the speculation about the wedding ceremony, complete with royal attendance? In part, the answer lies in the play's thematic focus on love consummated in marriage. The final ritual blessing of the bride beds can be seen as the culmination of the elaborate festivities, including song, music, dancing, and plays, that often accompanied upper-class Elizabethan marriages. In part, imagining a specific historical occasion helps to articulate and to contain an uncertainty, at once pleasurable and disturbing, about the borderline between reality and illusion: as in a hall of mirrors, the real-life newlyweds whiling away the hours before bedtime by watching a play would see onstage other newlyweds whiling away the hours before bedtime by watching a play.

But, as four centuries of readers and playgoers have found, you do not need to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on your wedding day, nor do you need to be an aristocrat, to savor its delights. There have, to be sure, been a few dissenters: the diarist Samuel Pepys wrote after seeing a production in 1662 that "it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life," though he took note of "some good dancing and some handsome women." Most audiences have been vastly more enthusiastic. The play has inspired a succession of musical adaptations and settings, along with famously lavish productions. By the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's bare stage had given way to gorgeous sets, with twinkling lights, fairies rising on midnight mushrooms, the moon shining over the Acropolis, and live rabbits hopping across carpets of flowers. Film is, of course, well-suited to such



Cupid and his victims. From Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatographie* (1540).

fantasies, as a series of famous movies have shown, but *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has proved equally at home in the simplest of settings. Generations of schoolchildren have romped through cardboard forests, while in Peter Brook's influential 1970 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company the actors performed (often on trapeze) in a three-sided, brightly lit, bare white box.

Working its magic on the imagination, Shakespeare's visionary poetic drama appeals to an unusually broad spectrum of spectators. The play may induce fantasies of aristocratic or private pleasure, but it does so with the resources of the public stage. If it mocks the working-class artisans (who are simply called "the rabble" in one quarto stage direction), it also laughs at the well-born young lovers. Its language reflects an unusually high incidence of the tropes familiar to those who had received rhetorical and literary training, but you do not have to learn the Greek names for these tropes—*anaphora*, *isocolon*, *epizeuxis*, and the like—to enjoy their effects. Take, for example, the exchange between Lysander and Hermia in the wake of Egeus's attempt to block their betrothal:

LYSANDER The course of true love never did run smooth,
But either it was different in blood—
HERMIA O cross!—too high to be enthralled to low.
LYSANDER Or else misgrafted in respect of years—
HERMIA O spite!—too old to be engaged to young.
LYSANDER Or merit stood upon the choice of friends—
HERMIA O hell!—to choose love by another's eyes.
(1.1.134–40)

The alternation of single lines, called *stichomythia*, is a scheme Shakespeare borrowed from the Roman playwright Seneca and used in different ways in many of his plays. The effect here is to convey the lovers' mutual anguish, tinged it slightly perhaps with a gently ironic distance that evaporates in the poignant lament that follows (lines 141–49). The rhetorical devices, along with the subtle modulations from blank verse to rhymed couplets to boisterous comic prose, are so deftly handled that their pleasures are accessible to the learned and unlearned alike. This breadth also reflects the very wide range of cultural materials that the playwright has cunningly woven together, from the classical heritage of the educated elite to popular ballads and folk customs, from refined and sophisticated entertainments to the coarser delights of farce.

The exquisite lyricism of much of the play, the celebration of aristocratic pastimes such as the hunt, and a vision of courtly glamour conjure up an upper-class milieu. There is no single literary source for Shakespeare's depiction of this world, or indeed for the play as a whole, but he is indebted for the legendary Theseus and Hippolyta to Thomas North's translation (1579) of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, and still more to Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. The *Dream* repeatedly echoes Chaucer's references to observing "the rite of May," a folk custom still current in Elizabethan England and quite possibly known to Shakespeare personally. To the dismay of Puritans, who regarded the celebration as a lascivious remnant of paganism, young men and women of all classes would go out into the woods and fields to welcome the May with singing and dancing. Shakespeare's title associates this custom with another occasion for festive release: Midsummer Eve (June 23), when the solstice was marked not only by holiday license but by tales of fairy spells and temporary madness.



Pyramus and Thisbe. From George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635).

Some Elizabethan aristocrats kept theatrical troupes as liveried servants, along with young pages who could sing and perform, and powerful magnates, both secular and religious, often had plays, masquerades, and elaborate shows staged in their houses. From this milieu Shakespeare derives a vision of what we can call the revels of power, performances designed to entertain, gratify, and reflect the values of those at the top. From this milieu too Shakespeare absorbs a sense of social hierarchy: a distinction between Duke Theseus, at once imperious and genteel, and Egeus, wealthy but distinctly lower in rank and harping on what is his by law, along with a more marked distinction between these characters and the artisans, loyal members of the lower orders, regarded by their social superiors with condescending indulgence.

The artisans—or "rude mechanicals," as they are called—enable Shakespeare to introduce wonderful swoops into earthy prose, snatches of jigs, a comical taste for the grotesque, a glimpse of a world that usually resides beyond the horizon of courtly vision. The lovers at the pinnacle of the play's society do not know the names and trades of the "hard-handed men that work in Athens here" (5.1.72) who have come to offer them entertainment, but we the audience do, and we even know something of their hopes and dreams. As with the Pageant of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, we are invited at once to join in the mockery of the inept performers and to distance ourselves from the mockers. That is, the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not simply mirrored in the play's upper classes: the real audience is given a broader perspective, a more capacious understanding than anyone onstage.

This understanding is signaled not only in our ability to take in both the courtly and popular dimensions of the play, but also in our ability to see what escapes both aristocrats and artisans: the world of the fairies. But what are the fairies? From what social milieu do they spring? It is tempting to reply that they are denizens of the country; that is, characters drawn from the semipagan folklore of rural England. This is at least partially true: Reginald Scot, who wrote a brilliant attack on witchcraft persecutions (*The Discoverie of Witchcraft*,

1584), suggests that Robin Goodfellow, the mischievous spirit also called a Puck, was once feared by villagers, but was now widely recognized to be a figure of mere "illusion and knaverie." Yet intensive scholarly research over several generations has suggested that Shakespeare's fairies are quite unlike those his audience might have credited, half-credited, or—as Scot hoped—discredited.

The fairies of Elizabethan popular belief were often threatening and dangerous, while those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are generally benevolent. The former steal human infants, perhaps to sacrifice them to the devil, while the latter, even when they quarrel over a young boy, do so to bestow love and favor upon him; the former leave deformed, emaciated children in place of those they have stolen, while the latter trip nimbly through the palace blessing the bride beds and warding off deformities. Shakespeare's fairies have some of the menacing associations of "real" fairies—Puck speaks of shrouds and gaping graves, while the quarrel between Oberon and Titania has disrupted the seasons and damaged the crops, as wicked spirits were said to do. But the fairies we see are, as Oberon says, "spirits of another sort." Oberon and Titania (whose names Shakespeare took from the French romance *Huon of Bordeaux* and from Ovid, respectively) repeatedly demonstrate their good will toward mortals, though they have very little good will toward each other. The fairy king and queen are distressed at the unintended consequences of their quarrel, and each is involved, with romantic generosity, in the happiness of Theseus and Hippolyta. This generosity extends beyond the immediate range of their interests: in the midst of plotting to humiliate Titania, Oberon attempts to intervene on behalf of the spurned Helena, and though this intervention proves, through Puck's mistake, to lead to hopeless confusion, the fairies make amends.

Indeed, if Puck takes mischievous delight in the discord he has helped to sow among the four young lovers—"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (3.2.115)—he is not the originator of that discord, and he is the indispensable agent for setting things right. In his role as both mischief maker and matchmaker, Puck resembles the crafty slave in comedies by the Latin playwrights Plautus and Terence, a stock character who sometimes seems to enjoy and contribute to the plot's tangles but who manages in the end to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the young lovers.

This resemblance brings us to yet another of the cultural elements that Shakespeare cunningly interweaves in the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. From the classical literary tradition he must have first encountered in grammar school, Shakespeare derives the ancient Greek setting, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the comic transformation of a man into an ass as told in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, and, above all, the basic plot device of young lovers contriving to escape the rigid will of a stern father. This device was one of the staples of the New Comedy of ancient Greece and was a mainstay as well in Roman comedy. The literary convention corresponds to certain aspects of actual life in Shakespeare's England, where lawsuits provide records of parents trying to compel children to marry against their will. But the historical problem of marital consent has a complex relation to its artistic representation. Not only does the play exaggerate the actual punitive power of the father—Egeus threatens his disobedient daughter with death (to which Theseus offers, as a grim alternative, the nunnery)—but it also exaggerates the release from this power by staging the giddy possibility of a marriage based entirely on love and desire rather than parental will.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this release, a highly implausible dream for any Elizabethan member of the middle or upper classes, is brought about by a further plot device: the escape from the court or city to the "green world" of the forest. This theatrical structure is not characteristic of the New Comedy, but it somewhat resembles the Saturnalian rhythms of the Old Comedy of Aristophanes, with its festive release from the discipline and sobriety of everyday life, and, still more perhaps, it reflects certain English folk customs, such as Maying. When Theseus comes upon the four exhausted lovers asleep in the woods, he thinks that "they rose up early to observe / The rite of May" (4.1.129–30).

But, of course, Theseus is wrong. The lovers were not out a-Maying, but had spent the

night stumbling through the woods in a confused state of fear, anger, and desire. When it enters the charmed, moonlit space of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "the rite of May," along with the other rituals and representations Shakespeare stitched together in creating his play, is transformed; to use Peter Quince's term for the metamorphosed Bottom, the rites and rituals are "translated." Folk customs, the revels of power, the classical tradition as taught in schools, all are displaced from their points of origin, their enabling institutions and assumptions, and brought into a new space, the space of the Shakespearean stage.

This "translation" has, in every case, the odd effect of simultaneous elevation and enervation, celebration and parody. Thus the minor Ovidian tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is greatly elaborated but also travestied; the popular realm is at once lovingly represented and mercilessly ridiculed; the revels of power are reproduced but also ironically distanced.

Some of the play's most wonderful moments spring from the zany conjunction of distinct and even opposed theatrical modes (a conjunction characteristically parodied in the oxymoronic title of the artisans' play, "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth" [5.1.56–57]). Thus, for example, exquisite love poetry and low comedy meet in the wonderful moment in which the queen of fairies awakens to become enraptured at the sight of the most flatulently absurd of the mechanicals, Bottom. Bottom has been transformed with perfect appropriateness into an ass, yet it is he who is granted the play's most exquisite vision of delight and who articulates, in a comically confused burlesque of St. Paul (1 Corinthians 2:9), the deepest sense of wonder: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was" (4.1.204–07).

It would be asinine, the play suggests, to try to expound this dream, but we can at least suggest that, whatever its meaning, its existence is closely linked to the nature of the theater itself. Puck suggests as much when he proposes in the Epilogue that the audience imagine that it has all along been slumbering: the play it has seen has been a collective hallucination. The play, then, is a dream about watching a play about dreams. Fittingly, the comedy devotes much of its last act to a parody of a theatrical performance, as if its most enduring concern were not the fate of the lovers but the possibility of performing plays. The entire last act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is unnecessary in terms of the plot: by Oberon's intervention and Theseus's fiat, the plot complications have all been resolved at the end of Act 4. Knots that had seemed almost impossible to untangle—Theseus had declared in Act 1 that he was powerless to overturn the ancient privilege of Athens invoked by Egeus—suddenly dissolve. The absurdly easy resolution of an apparently hopeless dilemma characterizes not only the lovers' legal but also their emotional condition, a blend of mad confusion and geometric logic that is settled, apparently permanently, with the aid of the fairies' magical love juice.



A fairy hill. From Olaus Magnus, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (1558).

But this diagrammatic settling of affairs sits uncomfortably with all that the lovers have experienced in the woods. Both critics and directors have given different weight to this experience. Some treat the lovers as mindless comic puppets, jerked by the playwright's invisible strings, while others take more seriously the darkness that shadows their words and actions. This darkness includes emotional violence and masochism, the betrayal of friendship, the radical fickleness of desire. It extends to the play's sexual politics. Under the strain of the night's adventures, the friendship between Hermia and Helena begins to crack apart, while Lysander and Demetrius become bitter rivals. Though they are eventually reconciled, it is as if the heterosexual couplings can only be formed by painfully sundering the intimate same-sex bonds that preceded them. Shakespeare had begun to reflect on this problem as early as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, possibly his first play, and throughout his career he returned to it repeatedly, including in what is possibly his last play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. For the most part, the broken friendships are repaired, but, as with Antonio and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and Leontes and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*, there is usually a lingering sense of loss, from which even the sunnier *Midsummer Night's Dream* is not completely exempt.

In another very early play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare had also begun his lifelong reflection on the struggle between men and women, a struggle frequently focused on the male desire to dominate and subdue the female. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, tension flares in the case of the fairies into open conflict and leads to Oberon's plot to humiliate Titania. In the human world of the play, this tension is less immediately apparent, but in the first scene Theseus alludes to his military conquest of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, and there are other brief glimpses of cruelty, indifference, and rage. Those who see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as lighthearted entertainment must somehow laugh off this darkness; those who wish to emphasize the play's more troubling and discordant notes must somehow neutralize the comic register in which such notes are sounded. For example, the brutal insults hurled at Hermia by the young man who had loved her and with whom she has eloped might well seem extremely painful, but the fantastic language in which these insults are expressed—

Get you gone, you dwarf,
You *minimus* of hind'ring knot-grass made,
You bead, you acorn

(3.2.329–31)

—distances audiences from the pain and generates laughter.

Audiences for most productions tend to oscillate between engagement and detachment. In the young lovers' choices and sufferings, we encounter a situation where the final outcome doesn't matter greatly to us but matters greatly to them. And while we see the characters from a distance—though Hermia and Helena are distinct enough, even attentive readers occasionally find it difficult to remember which is Lysander and which Demetrius—we also experience at least glancingly *their* sense of how important the difference is, how unbearable to be matched against one's consent, how painfully difficult to make a match that corresponds to one's desires.

Desires in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are intense, irrational, and alarmingly mobile. This mobility, the speed with which desire can be detached from one object and attached to a different object, does not diminish the exigency of the passion, for the lovers are convinced at every moment that their choices are irrefutably rational and irresistibly compelling. But there is no security in these choices, and the play is repeatedly haunted by a fear of abandonment. The emblem, as well as agent, of a dangerously mobile desire is the fairies' love juice. No human being in the play experiences a purely abstract, objectless desire; when you desire, you desire *someone*. But the love juice is the distilled essence of erotic mobility itself, and it is appropriately in the power of the fairies. For the fairies seem to embody the principle of what we might call polytropic desire: that is, desire that can instantaneously fix itself on any object, including an ass-headed man, and that can with equal instantaneousness swerve away from that object and on to another. Oberon and

Titania have, we learn, long histories of amorous adventures; they are aware of each other's wayward passions; and, endowed with an extraordinary, eroticizing rhetoric, they move endlessly through the spiced, moonlit night.

If there is a link between the fairies and the erotic, there is a still more powerful link between the fairies and the imagination. Theseus makes the connection explicit when he rejects the stories that the lovers have told him: "I never may believe / These antique fables, nor these fairy toys." In a famous speech (5.1.2–22), he accounts for such fables and toys as products of the imagination. The speech reflects Theseus's misplaced confidence in his own sense of waking reality, a reality that does not include fairies. Yet paradoxically, in dismissively categorizing the lunatic, the lover, and the poet as "of imagination all compact," he manages to articulate insights that the play seems to uphold. Those in the grip of a powerful imagination may be loosed from the moorings of reason and nature, and they may inhabit a world of wish fulfillment and its converse, nightmare. But the poet whose imagination "bodies forth / The forms of things unknown" (5.1.14–15) has created *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, giving his fantasies—including the fantasy called "Theseus"—"a local habitation and a name." Finally, it is the imagination that enables giddy, restless, changeable mortals to attach their desires to a particular person.

For Theseus, the imagination is the agent of delusion—and there is much in the play that would seem to support this conclusion. But his account is not complete without Hippolyta's insistence that the story the four young lovers tell seems to have something that goes beyond delusion. Their minds, she observes, have been "transfigured" together, and this shared transfiguration bears witness to "something of great constancy; / But howsoever, strange and admirable" (5.1.26–27). It is as if we were all to wake up one morning and discover we had had the same dream.

And, of course, we in the audience have, as Puck's epilogue suggests, had just this experience: the experience of the theater. In the theater, we confront a living representation of the complex relation between transfiguration and delusion, a relation explored with fantastic, anxious literalness in the artisans' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. In reassuring the ladies that the lion is only Snug the Joiner, that nothing is what it claims to be, the players simultaneously burlesque the stage and call attention to the basic elements from which any performance is made: rudimentary scenery, artisans, language, imagination, desire.

There is precious little evidence, to be sure, of either imagination or desire in the artisans' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Their absence is part of the comical awfulness of the play-within-the-play, the reason in effect that it does not become the Shakespearean tragedy it so strikingly resembles, *Romeo and Juliet*. And yet, as Theseus says, "The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them." "It must be your imagination, then," Hippolyta points out, "and not theirs" (5.1.208–10). But that is true of performances far greater than that of which the artisans are capable. If we are to see fairies onstage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and not simply flesh-and-blood actors (probably boy actors in Shakespeare's theater), it must be our imagination that makes amends. So too if we are to believe in the lovers' desire and sympathize with their predicament, it must be *our* desire that animates their words.

Such, at least, is the vision of the theater suggested by the play that Bottom and company offer to the newlyweds. There is nothing really out there, their performance implies, except what the audience dreams is there. Yet in the closing moments of the play, when the fairies emerge from the woods and venture into Theseus's mansion to bless the bride beds, a quite different vision of theater is suggested, one in which the dreams and desires that we have are determined by forces over which we have no control, forces that only a playwright's love juice can make visible under an imaginary moon.

STEPHEN GREENBLATT

TEXTUAL NOTE

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* was entered in the Stationers' Register on October 8, 1600, and printed that same year in quarto:

A Midsommer nights drame. As it hath beene sundry times publickely acted, by the Right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants. Written by William Shakespeare. Imprinted at London, for Thomas Fisher, and are to be sould at his shoppe, at the Signe of the White Hart, in Fleetestreete. 1600.

This quarto (Q1) was evidently prepared from a manuscript in Shakespeare's hand. A second quarto (Q2), printed in 1619 (though falsely dated 1600), corrects some errors in Q1, but it also introduces new errors. This second quarto was used as the basis for the 1623 First Folio text of the play (F), though the Folio editors also had recourse to a theatrical manuscript, probably a promptbook in the possession of Shakespeare's company, the King's Men. Evidence for this manuscript includes a Folio stage direction before 5.1.126: "Tawyer with a Trumpet before them." "Tawyer" presumably refers to William Tawyer, a musician employed by the King's Men.

From this theatrical manuscript evidently derived several alterations in stage directions and in speech prefixes, the most notable of which is the substitution in Act 5 of Egeus for Philostrate as the master of ceremonies. The substitution may simply be a mistake: in an early performance; the same actor may have played the parts of both Egeus and Philostrate, and this doubling may have led to an error in the speech prefix. But it is also possible that the play was revised in order to integrate the disgruntled Egeus more fully into the festive conclusion.

Act and scene divisions all derive from F; there are none in the quarto text. Traditionally, Act 3, Scene 2 continues to the end of the act, but since the stage is apparently cleared at 3.2.413, this edition marks a break (perhaps indicating a gap in time and place) by dividing the scene in two and designating a third scene. In F, at the end of Act 3 there is a stage direction, "They sleepe all the Act," which indicates that the four lovers remain asleep onstage during the interval customary between acts and that the action that resumes in the next act is understood to be continuous.

On the basis of mislined verses in 5.1.1–84, scholars have conjectured that Shakespeare must have revised Theseus's speech as originally conceived and added lines in the margin of his copy. Since these revisions apparently give us a fascinating glimpse of Shakespeare's process of composition, this book appends a reconstruction of what would have been the original speech.

The control text for this edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is Q1 (1600). But in keeping with the Oxford editors' principle of basing their text on the most theatrical early version of each play—that is, the version closest to the play as performed by Shakespeare's company during the playwright's own lifetime—changes in speech prefixes and other substantive variants have been adopted from F.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barber, C. L. "May Games and Metamorphoses on a Midsummer's Night." *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- Briggs, K. M. *The Anatomy of Puck*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959.
- Calderwood, James L. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Illusion of Drama." *Modern Language Quarterly* 26 (1965): 506–22.
- Dent, Robert W. "Imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (1964): 115–29.
- Girard, René. "Myth and Ritual in Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ed. Josue V. Harari. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979.

Kott, Jan. "Titania and the Ass's Head." *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Trans. Boleslaw Taborski. 2nd ed. London: 1967.

Montrose, Louis Adrian. "Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 61–94.

Shaw, George Bernard. "A Midsummer Night's Dream." *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Productions of Shakespeare*. Ed. Edwin Wilson. New York: Dutton, 1961.

Watt, Richard Jr. "Films of a Moonstruck World." *Focus on Shakespeare's Films*. Ed. Charles W. Eckert. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Young, David P. *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THESEUS, Duke of Athens
 HIPPOLYTA, Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus
 PHILOSTRATE, Master of the Revels to Theseus
 EGEUS, father of Hermia
 HERMIA, daughter of Egeus, in love with Lysander
 LYSANDER, loved by Hermia
 DEMETRIUS, suitor to Hermia
 HELENA, in love with Demetrius
 OBERON, King of Fairies
 TITANIA, Queen of Fairies
 ROBIN GOODFELLOW, a puck
 PEASEBLOSSOM
 COBWEB
 MOTE
 MUSTARDSEED
 Peter QUINCE, a carpenter
 Nick BOTTOM, a weaver
 Francis FLUTE, a bellows-mender
 Tom SNOUT, a tinker
 SNUG, a joiner
 Robin STARVELING, a tailor
 Attendant lords and fairies

1.1

Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, [and PHILOSTRATE,] with others

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
 Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
 Another moon—but O, methinks how slow
 This old moon wanes! She lingers^o my desires
 Like to a stepdame^o or a dowager
 Long withering out a young man's revenue.¹
 HIPPOLYTA Four days will quickly steep^o themselves in night,
 Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
 And then the moon, like to a silver bow
 New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
 Of our solemnities.
 THESEUS Go, Philostrate,
 Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments.
 Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth.
 Turn melancholy forth to funerals—
 The pale companion is not for our pomp. [Exit PHILOSTRATE]
 Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,
 And won thy love doing thee injuries.²

*delays fulfillment of,
stepmother*

plunge

But I will wed thee in another key—
 With pomp, with triumph,^o and with revelling.
*Enter EGEUS³ and his daughter HERMIA, and LYSANDER
and DEMETRIUS*

public festivity

20 EGEUS Happy be Theseus, our renowned Duke.
 THESEUS Thanks, good Egeus. What's the news with thee?
 EGEUS Full of vexation come I, with complaint
 Against my child, my daughter Hermia.—
 Stand forth Demetrius.—My noble lord,
 25 This man hath my consent to marry her.—
 Stand forth Lysander.—And, my gracious Duke,
 This hath bewitched the bosom of my child.
 Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
 And interchanged love tokens with my child.
 30 Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
 With feigning⁴ voice verses of feigning love,
 And stol'n the impression of her fantasy⁵
 With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds,^o conceits,^o
 Knacks,^o trifles, nosegays,^o sweetmeats—messengers
 35 Of strong prevailment^o in unhardened youth.
 With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
 Turned her obedience, which is due to me
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,
 Be it so^o she will not here before your grace
 40 Consent to marry with Demetrius,
 I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
 As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
 Which shall be either to this gentleman
 Or to her death, according to our law
 45 Immediately^o provided in that case.

*trinkets / clever gifts
Knickknacks / bouquets
persuasiveness*

If

Expressly

THESEUS What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid.
 To you your father should be as a god,
 One that composed^o your beauties, yea, and one
 To whom you are but as a form in wax,
 50 By him imprinted,⁶ and within his power
 To leave^o the figure or disfigure^o it.
 Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

maintain / destroy

HERMIA So is Lysander.

THESEUS In himself he is,
 But in this kind,^o wanting your father's voice,⁷
 55 The other must be held the worthier.

respect

HERMIA I would my father looked but with my eyes.
 THESEUS Rather your eyes must with his judgement look.

HERMIA I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
 I know not by what power I am made bold,
 60 Nor how it may concern^o my modesty
 In such a presence here to plead my thoughts,
 But I beseech your grace that I may know
 The worst that may befall me in this case
 If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

befit

1.1 Location: Theseus's palace in Athens.
 1. a dowager . . . revenue: a widow using up the inheritance that will go to her husband's (young) heir on her

death.
 2. Theseus captured Hippolyta in his military conquest of the Amazons.

3. Pronounced "Ege-us," accented on the second syllable.
 4. A triple pun: desiring; feigning; soft (in music).
 5. stol'n . . . fantasy: by craftily impressing your image on her imagination, like a seal in wax, you have stolen her

love.
 6. you are . . . imprinted: you are a wax impression of his seal.
 7. Lacking your father's consent or vote.

65 THESEUS Either to die the death,^o or to abjure
For ever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.
Know^o of your youth, examine well your blood,^o
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
70 You can endure the livery^o of a nun,
For aye^o to be in shady cloister mewed,^o
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.⁸
Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
75 To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;^o
But earthlier happy is the rose distilled⁹
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.^o
HERMIA So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
80 Ere I will yield my virgin patent¹ up
Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.
THESEUS Take time to pause, and by the next new moon—
The scaling day betwixt my love and me
85 For everlasting bond of fellowship—
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
Or on Diana's altar to protest^o
90 For aye austerity and single life.
DEMETRIUS Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield
'Thy crazed title^o to my certain right.
LYSANDER You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him.
95 EGEUS Scornful Lysander! 'Tis true, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall render him,
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate^o unto Demetrius.
LYSANDER [to THESEUS] I am, my lord, as well derived^o as he,
100 As well possessed.^o My love is more than his,
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked,
If not with vantage,^o as Demetrius;
And—which is more than all these boasts can be—
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
105 Why should not I then prosecute^o my right?
Demetrius—I'll avouch it to his head^o—
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul, and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry
110 Upon this spotted and inconstant² man.
THESEUS I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being over-full of self affairs,^o
My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come;
115 And come, Egeus. You shall go with me.

be execute

Inquire / passion

hab.
ever / caged i

life as a virg

celibat

vo

unsound claim

settle; besto

descende

endowed with wealth

superiorit

pursu

fac

my own concern

I have some private schooling^o for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm^o yourself
To fit your fancies^o to your father's will,
Or else the law of Athens yields you up—
120 Which by no means we may extenuate^o—
To death or to a vow of single life.
Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?—
Demetrius and Egeus, go along.
I must employ you in some business
125 Against^o our nuptial, and confer with you
Of something nearly that³ concerns yourselves.
EGEUS With duty and desire we follow you.
Exeunt. Manent LYSANDER and HERMIA
LYSANDER How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?
130 HERMIA Belike^o for want of rain, which I could well
Beteem^o them from the tempest of my eyes.
LYSANDER Ay me, for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth,
135 But either it was different in blood^o—
HERMIA O cross!^o—too high to be enthralled to low.
LYSANDER Or else misgrafted^o in respect of years—
HERMIA O spite!—too old to be engaged to young.
LYSANDER Or merit stood^o upon the choice of friends^o—
140 HERMIA O hell!—to choose love by another's eyes.
LYSANDER Or if there were a sympathy^o in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary^o as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
145 Brief as the lightning in the collied^o night,
That, in a spleen,^o unfolds^o both heaven and earth,
And, ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!',
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
So quick⁴ bright things come to confusion.
150 HERMIA If then true lovers have been ever^o crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny.
Then let us teach our trial patience,⁵
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts, and dreams, and sighs,
155 Wishes, and tears, poor fancy's^o followers.
LYSANDER A good persuasion.^o Therefore hear me, Hermia.
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child,
And she respects^o me as her only son.
160 From Athens is her house remote seven leagues.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee,
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st me then,
Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night,
165 And in the wood, a league without^o the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena

advice

prepare

desires

mitigate

In preparation for

Remain

Probably

Afford; grant

hereditary rank

vexation

badly matched

rested / kin

an agreement

momentary

coal-black

swift impulse / reveals

always

love's

principle, doctrine

regards

outside

8. The emblem of Diana, goddess of chastity.

1. My right to remain a virgin.

9. Made use of (roses were distilled to make perfumes).
earthlier happy: happier on earth.

2. spotted and inconstant: stained with fickleness.

3. nearly that: that closely.

4. Quickly (adverb); vital, lively (adjective).

5. Let us teach ourselves to be patient in this trial.

To do observance to a morn of May,⁶
There will I stay for thee.

celebrate May Day

HERMIA My good Lysander,
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
170 By his best arrow with the golden head,⁶
By the simplicity⁷ of Venus' doves,⁷
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen
When the false Trojan under sail was seen,⁸
175 By all the vows that ever men have broke—
In number more than ever women spoke—
In that same place thou hast appointed me
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

innocence

LYSANDER Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

Enter HELENA

180 HERMIA God speed, fair⁹ Helena. Whither away?
HELENA Call you me fair? That 'fair' again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair—O happy fair!⁹
Your eyes are lodestars,⁹ and your tongue's sweet air⁹
More tuneable⁹ than lark to shepherd's ear
185 When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching. O, were favour⁹ so!
Your words I catch, fair Hermia; ere I go,
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.
190 Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,⁹
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.⁹
O, teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion⁹ of Demetrius' heart.
HERMIA I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.
195 HELENA O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!
HERMIA I give him curses, yet he gives me love.
HELENA O that my prayers could such affection move!
HERMIA The more I hate, the more he follows me.
HELENA The more I love, the more he hateth me.
200 HERMIA His folly, Helen, is no fault of mine.
HELENA None but your beauty; would that fault were mine!
HERMIA Take comfort. He no more shall see my face.

*fortunate beauty
guiding stars / melody
tuneful*

looks; charms

*excepted
transformed*

desire

Lysander and myself will fly this place.
Before the time I did Lysander see
205 Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.
O then, what graces in my love do dwell,
That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell?

LYSANDER Helen, to you our minds we will unfold.
Tomorrow night, when Phoebe⁹ doth behold
210 Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass—
A time that lovers' sleights doth still⁹ conceal—
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

Diana (the moon)

always

HERMIA And in the wood where often you and I
215 Upon faint⁹ primrose beds were wont⁹ to lie,

pale / accustomed

6. Cupid's sharp golden arrow was said to create love; his blunt lead arrow caused dislike.
7. Said to draw Venus's chariot.
8. *fire . . . seen*: Dido, Queen of Carthage, burned herself

on a funeral pyre when her lover, Aeneas, sailed away.
9. The dialogue plays on the meanings "blonde," "beautiful," "beauty." Helena is presumably fair-haired and Hermia (called a "raven" at 2.2.120) a brunette.

Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet,
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes
To seek new friends and stranger companies.⁹
220 Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us,
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius.—
Keep word, Lysander. We must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

the company of strangers

LYSANDER I will, my Hermia.

Exit HERMIA

Helena, adieu.

225 As you on him, Demetrius dote on you.
HELENA How happy some o'er other some¹ can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
230 And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,⁹
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,²
235 And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste;⁹
Wings and no eyes figure⁹ unheedy haste.
And therefore is love said to be a child
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
240 As waggish⁹ boys in game⁹ themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's cyne⁹
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine,
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
245 So he dissolved,⁹ and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her, and for this intelligence⁹
If I have thanks it is a dear expense.³
250 But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

Exit

shape; proportion

*any trace of judgment
symbolize*

playful / sport, play

eyes

broke faith; melted

information

Exit

1.2

*Enter QUINCE the carpenter, and SNUG the joiner, and
BOTTOM the weaver, and FLUTE the bellows-mender, and
SNOUT the tinker, and STARVELING the tailor¹*

QUINCE Is all our company here?

BOTTOM You were best to call them generally,² man by man,
according to the scrip.⁹

script; list

QUINCE Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought

1. *o'er other some*: in comparison with others.

2. Love is promoted not by the evidence of the senses, but by the fancies of the mind.

3. Costly (because of the betrayal of secrecy and because it leads Demetrius to Hermia); or welcome (because the potential return is Demetrius's love regained).

1.2 Location: Somewhere in the city of Athens.

1. The artisans' names recall their occupations. Quince's name is probably derived from "quoins," wooden wedges used by carpenters who made buildings such as houses

and theaters. The name "Snug" evokes well-finished wooden furniture made by joiners. A bottom was the piece of wood on which thread was wound; Bottom's name also connotes "ass" and "lowest point." As Flute's name suggests, domestic bellows whistle through holes when needing repair. Snout's name may refer to the spouts of the kettles he repairs, or to his nose. Tailors, as Starveling's name recalls, were proverbially thin.
2. Bottom's error for "individually" (he frequently mistakes words in this manner).

5 fit through all Athens to play in our interlude³ before the Duke
and the Duchess on his wedding day at night.
BOTTOM First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on;
then read the names of the actors; and so grow to a point.³
QUINCE Marry,⁴ our play is *The Most Lamentable Comedy and*
10 *Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*.⁴
BOTTOM A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry.
Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll.
Masters, spread yourselves.
QUINCE Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver?
15 BOTTOM Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.
QUINCE You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.
BOTTOM What is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?
QUINCE A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.
BOTTOM That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If
20 I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move stones. I
will condole,⁵ in some measure. To the rest.—Yet my chief
humour⁶ is for a tyrant. I could play 'ere'les⁵ rarely,⁶ or a part
to tear a cat⁶ in, to make all split.⁶
The raging rocks
25 And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates,
And Phibus' car⁶
Shall shine from far
30 And make and mar
The foolish Fates.
This was lofty. Now name the rest of the players.—This is
'ere'les' vein, a tyrant's vein. A lover is more condoling.
QUINCE Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?
35 FLUTE Here, Peter Quince.
QUINCE Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.
FLUTE What is 'Thisbe? A wand'ring knight?⁷
QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.
FLUTE Nay, faith, let not me play a woman.⁷ I have a beard
40 coming.
QUINCE That's all one.⁸ You shall play it in a mask,⁸ and you
may speak as small⁸ as you will.
BOTTOM An⁸ I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too. I'll
speak in a monstrous⁹ little voice: "Thisbe, Thisbe!"—"Ah
45 Pyramus, my lover dear, thy Thisbe dear and lady dear."
QUINCE No, no, you must play Pyramus; and Flute, you Thisbe.
BOTTOM Well, proceed.
QUINCE Robin Starveling, the tailor?
STARVELING Here, Peter Quince.
50 QUINCE Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother. Tom
Snout, the tinker?
SNOUT Here, Peter Quince.
QUINCE You, Pyramus' father; myself, Thisbe's father. Snug the

brief play

By the Virgin Mary

lament; arouse pity
inclination/excellently
rant/go to pieces

knight-errant

irrelevant
high-pitched, shrill
If
exceptionally

3. *grow to a point*: draw to a conclusion.
4. Parodying titles such as that of Thomas Preston's *Cambyes: A Lamentable Tragedy Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth* (c. 1570).
5. Hercules (a stock ranting role in early plays).
6. The chariot of Phoebus Apollo, the sun god (the odd spelling may represent Bottom's pronunciation).

7. On the Elizabethan stage, women's parts were played by boys and young men.
8. Elizabethan ladies regularly wore masks for anonymity and to protect their complexions.
9. Probably intended as a pet name for Thisbe; or it may mean "in this manner."

joiner, you the lion's part; and I hope here is a play fitted.⁹
55 SNUG Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it
me; for I am slow of study.
QUINCE You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.
BOTTOM Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any
man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the
60 Duke say 'Let him roar again; let him roar again'.
QUINCE An you should do it too terribly you would fright the
Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek, and that were
enough to hang us all.
ALL THE REST That would hang us, every mother's son.
65 BOTTOM I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out
of their wits they would have no more discretion but to hang
us, but I will aggravate⁹ my voice so that I will roar you as gently
as any sucking dove.¹ I will roar you an 'twere⁹ any nightingale.
QUINCE You can play no part but Pyramus; for Pyramus is a
70 sweet-faced man; a proper⁹ man as one shall see in a summer's
day; a most lovely, gentlemanlike man. Therefore you must
needs play Pyramus.
BOTTOM Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to
play it in?
75 QUINCE Why, what you will.
BOTTOM I will discharge⁹ it in either your straw-colour beard,
your orange-tawny² beard, your purple-in-grain⁹ beard, or your
French-crown-colour⁹ beard, your perfect yellow.
QUINCE Some of your French crowns have no hair at all,³ and
80 then you will play bare faced.⁹ But masters, here are your
parts,⁴ and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you to
con⁹ them by tomorrow night, and meet me in the palace wood
a mile without the town by moonlight. There will we rehearse;
for if we meet in the city we shall be dogged with company,
85 and our devices⁹ known. In the meantime I will draw a bill⁹ of
properties such as our play wants. I pray you fail me not.
BOTTOM We will meet, and there we may rehearse most
obscenely⁵ and courageously. Take pains; be perfect.⁶ Adieu.
QUINCE At the Duke's oak we meet.
90 BOTTOM Enough. Hold, or cut bowstrings.⁷ Exeunt

(well) cast

(for "moderate")
as though it were

handsome

perform
very deep red
gold-coin-colored

beardless; undisguised

memorize

plans / list

2.1

Enter a FAIRY at one door and ROBIN GOODFELLOW [a
puck]¹ at another

ROBIN How now, spirit, whither wander you?
FAIRY Over hill, over dale,
Thorough⁹ bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,⁹
5 Thorough flood, thorough fire:
I do wander everywhere

Through
enclosure, fence

1. Bottom confuses "sitting dove" and "sucking lamb."
2. Dark yellow, a recognized name for the dye. (Bottom the weaver shows his professional knowledge.)
3. Referring to the baldness caused by venereal disease ("the French disease").
4. Literally; an Elizabethan actor was generally given only his own lines and cues.
5. A comic blunder, possibly for "out of sight" (from the

scene or from being seen).
6. Letter perfect in learning your parts.
7. *Hold, or cut bowstrings* (from archery): Keep your word, or be disgraced (?).
2.1 Location: A wood near Athens.
1. A puck is a devil or an imp; in Elizabethan folklore, Robin Goodfellow (also known as Puck) was a mischievous spirit who would do housework if well treated.

- Swifter than the moon's sphere,²
And I serve the Fairy Queen
To dew her orbs³ upon the green.
10 The cowslips tall her pensioners⁴ be.
In their gold coats spots you see;
'Those be rubies, fairy favours;⁵
In those freckles live their savours.⁶
I must go seek some dewdrops here,
15 And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob⁷ of spirits; I'll be gone.
Our Queen and all her elves come here anon.
ROBIN The King doth keep his revels here tonight.
Take heed the Queen come not within his sight,
20 For Oberon is passing fell and wroth⁴
Because that she, as her attendant, hath
A lovely boy stol'n from an Indian king.
She never had so sweet a changeling;⁵
And jealous Oberon would have the child
25 Knight of his train, to trace⁶ the forests wild.
But she perforce⁷ withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
And now they never meet in grove, or green,
By fountain⁸ clear, or spangled starlight sheen,⁹
30 But they do square,¹⁰ that all their elves, for fear
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.
FAIRY Either I mistake your shape and making¹¹ quite
Or else you are that shrewd¹² and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he
35 That frights the maidens of the villag'ry,¹³
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,¹⁴
And bootless¹⁵ make the breathless housewife churn,
And sometime¹⁶ make the drink to bear no barm¹⁷—
Mislead night wanderers, laughing at their harm?
40 Those that 'hobgoblin' call you, and 'sweet puck',
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.
Are not you he?
ROBIN Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile
45 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,¹⁸
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's¹⁹ bowl
In very likeness of a roasted crab,²⁰
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
50 And on her withered dewlap²¹ pour the ale.
The wisest aunt²² telling the saddest²³ tale
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum. Down topples she,
And 'tailor' cries,²⁴ and falls into a cough,
55 And then the whole choir²⁵ hold their hips, and laugh,
- royal bodyguards
gifts
scent
country bumpkin
range
forcibly
spring / shining starlight
quarrel
form
mischievous
villages
hand mill
in vain
at times / froth on ale
trick
an old woman's
loose skin on neck
old woman / most serious
company

2. Each planet, including the moon, was thought to be fixed in a transparent hollow globe revolving round the earth. *moon's*: the obsolete genitive of "moon."
3. Sprinkle her fairy rings (circles of dark grass).
4. *passing fell and wroth*: exceedingly fierce and angry.
5. Usually a child left by fairies in exchange for one sto-

len, but here the stolen child.
6. Crab apple ("lamb's wool," a winter drink, was made with roasted apples and warm ale).
7. Possibly the old woman cries this because she ends up cross-legged on the floor as tailors sat to work or because she falls on her "tail."

- And waxen⁸ in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there. —
Enter [OBERON] King of Fairies at one door, with his
train, and [TITANIA] Queen at another, with hers
But make room, fairy: here comes Oberon.
FAIRY And here my mistress. Would that he were gone.
60 OBERON Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.
TITANIA What, jealous Oberon? — Fairies, skip hence.
I have forsworn his bed and company.
OBERON Tarry, rash wanton.⁹ Am not I thy lord?
TITANIA Then I must be thy lady; but I know
65 When thou hast stol'n away from fairyland
And in the shape of Corin⁸ sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love⁹
To amorous Phillida. Why art thou here
Come from the farthest step¹⁰ of India,
70 But that, forsooth, the bouncing¹¹ Amazon,
Your buskined¹² mistress and your warrior love,
To Theseus must be wedded, and you come
To give their bed joy and prosperity?
OBERON How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
75 Glance at my credit¹³ with Hippolyta,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?
Didst not thou lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigouna whom he ravished,
And make him with fair Aegles¹⁴ break his faith,
80 With Ariadne and Antiopa?¹⁵
TITANIA These are the forgeries of jealousy,
And never since the middle summer's spring¹⁶
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy¹⁷ brook,
85 Or in¹⁸ the beachèd margin¹⁹ of the sea
'To dance our ringlets²⁰ to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea
90 Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,
Hath every pelting²¹ river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents.²²
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn²³
95 Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain²⁴ flock.
The nine men's morris²⁵ is filled up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green²⁶
100 For lack of tread are undistinguishable.
- increase
impetuous creature
limit
vigorous
wearing hunting boots
Question my good name
beginning of midsummer
on / shore
circular dances
paltry
banks
grain
dead of disease

8. Corin and Phillida are typical names for a shepherd and shepherdess in pastoral poetry.

9. Making or reciting love poetry. *pipes of corn*: musical instruments made of oat stalks.

10. Perigouna and Aegles were previous mistresses of Theseus (taken from Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*).

11. Taken from Plutarch; some writers used "Antiopa" as an alternative name for the Amazonian queen Theseus married, although here it seems to refer to a different

woman. Ariadne helped Theseus kill the Minotaur and escape from his labyrinth on Crete; she fled with Theseus, but he deserted her on Naxos.

12. Fringed with reeds. *paved*: pebbled.

13. The playing area for this outdoor game (played with nine pebbles or pegs) was cut in turf.

14. Luxuriant grass. *quaint mazes*: intricate arrangements of paths (kept visible by use).

The human mortals want⁶ their winter cheer.⁶
 No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
 Therefore⁷ the moon, the governess of floods,
 Pale in her anger washes⁸ all the air,
 105 That rheumatic⁸ diseases do abound;
 And thorough this distemperature⁸ we see
 The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
 Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
 And on old Hiems⁹ thin and icy crown
 110 An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
 Is, as in mock'ry, set. The spring, the summer,
 The childing⁹ autumn, angry winter change
 Their wonted liveries,⁹ and the mazèd⁹ world
 By their increase⁹ now knows not which is which;
 115 And this same progeny of evils comes
 From our debate,⁹ from our dissension.
 We are their parents and original.⁹

OBERON Do you amend it, then. It lies in you.
 Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
 120 I do but beg a little changeling boy
 To be my henchman.⁹

TITANIA Set your heart at rest.¹
 The fairyland buys not the child of me.
 His mother was a vot'ress² of my order,
 And in the spiced Indian air by night
 125 Full often hath she gossiped by my side,
 And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
 Marking th'embarked traders² on the flood,²
 When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
 And grow big-bellied with the wanton² wind,
 130 Which she with pretty and with swimming³ gait
 Following,³ her womb then rich with my young squire,
 Would imitate, and sail upon the land
 To fetch me trifles, and return again
 As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
 135 But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
 And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
 And for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA Perchance till after Theseus' wedding day.

140 If you will patiently dance in our round,
 And see our moonlight revels, go with us.
 If not, shun me, and I will spare⁴ your haunts.

OBERON Give me that boy and I will go with thee.

TITANIA Not for thy fairy kingdom. — Fairies, away.

145 We shall chide⁵ downright if I longer stay.

Exeunt [TITANIA and her train]

OBERON Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from⁶ this grove
 Till I torment thee for this injury.⁶ —
 My gentle puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rest

lack

moistens, wets

bad weather; disturbance

winter's

fruitful

bewildered

crop yield

quarrel

origin

page of honor

merchant ships / tide

playful; amorous

Copying

avoid

quarrel

go from

insult

150 Since⁶ once I sat upon a promontory
 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
 Uttering such dulcet⁶ and harmonious breath⁶
 That the rude⁶ sea grew civil at her song
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres⁶
 To hear the sea-maid's music?

ROBIN I remember.

155 OBERON That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth
 Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,⁴
 And loosed his love-shaft⁴ smartly from his bow
 160 As⁴ it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
 But I might⁴ see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
 And the imperial vot'ress passèd on,
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free.⁴
 165 Yet marked I where the bolt⁴ of Cupid fell.
 It fell upon a little western flower —
 Before, milk-white; now, purple with love's wound —
 And maidens call it love-in-idleness.⁵

Fetch me that flower; the herb I showed thee once.
 170 The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
 Will make or⁶ man or woman madly dote
 Upon the next live creature that it sees.
 Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
 Ere the leviathan⁶ can swim a league.

175 ROBIN I'll put a girdle⁶ round about the earth
 In forty minutes.

Exit

OBERON Having once this juice
 I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
 And drop the liquor⁶ of it in her eyes.
 The next thing then she waking looks upon —
 180 Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
 On meddling monkey, or on busy ape —
 She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
 And ere I take this charm from off her sight —
 As I can take it with another herb —
 185 I'll make her render up her page to me.
 But who comes here? I am invisible,
 And I will overhear their conference.

Enter DEMETRIUS, HELENA following him

DEMETRIUS I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
 Where is Lysander, and fair Hermia?

190 The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me.
 Thou told'st me they were stol'n unto this wood,
 And here am I, and wood⁶ within this wood
 Because I cannot meet my Hermia.
 Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

195 HELENA You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant,⁷

When

sweet / voice; song

rough

orbits

golden arrow

As though

could

free of love thoughts

arrow

either

circle

juice

insane

6. Winter cheer would include the hymns and carols of the Yuletide. But Q, F reading: here.

7. As in lines 88 and 93 above, referring to the consequences of their quarrel.

8. Characterized by rheum: colds, coughs, etc.

9. Customary clothing.

1. Proverbial expression for "Abandon that idea."

2. Woman who has taken a vow to serve (often religious).

3. As though gliding through the waves.

4. To the west of India; in England, *vestal*: virgin (a compliment to Queen Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, and possibly an allusion to a specific entertainment in her honor, such as the water pageant at Elvetham in 1591).

5. Pansy. (Classical legend describes how the mulberry

turned purple with Pyramus's blood and the hyacinth with Hyacinthus's, but does not mention the pansy.)

6. Biblical sea monster, identified with the whale.

7. Very hard stone supposed to have magnetic properties. *draw me*: the magnetic power of attraction.

But yet you draw not iron; for my heart
Is true as steel.⁸ Leave you⁹ your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.
DEMETRIUS Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?⁹
200 Or rather do I not in plainest truth
Tell you I do not nor I cannot love you?
HELENA And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel, and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me I will fawn on you.
205 Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worse place can I beg in your love—
And yet a place of high respect with me—
210 Than to be used as you use your dog?
DEMETRIUS Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.
HELENA And I am sick when I look not on you.
DEMETRIUS You do impeach^o your modesty too much,
215 To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night,
And the ill counsel of a desert^o place,
With the rich worth of your virginity.
220 HELENA Your virtue is my privilege,^o for that^o
It is not night when I do see your face;
Therefore I think I am not in the night,
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company;
For you in my respect^o are all the world.
225 Then how can it be said I am alone,
When all the world is here to look on me?
DEMETRIUS I'll run from thee, and hide me in the brakes,^o
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.
HELENA The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
230 Run when you will. The story shall be changed:
Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase.¹
The dove pursues the griffin,² the mild hind^o
Makes speed to catch the tiger: bootless^o speed,
When cowardice pursues, and valour flies.
235 DEMETRIUS I will not stay thy questions.³ Let me go;
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.
HELENA Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius,
240 Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex.⁴
We cannot fight for love as men may do;
We should be wooed, and were not made to woo.
I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell,
To die upon the hand I love so well.

8. Hermia contrasts the base metal iron with steel, which holds its temper.

9. Do I speak kindly to you?

1. A reversal of the traditional myth in which the nymph Daphne, flying from Apollo, was transformed into a laurel tree to escape him.

2. Fabulous monster with a lion's body and an eagle's head and wings.

3. I will not wait here any longer to hear you talk.

4. Your injustice to me causes me to behave in a way that disgraces my sex (by wooing him rather than being wooed).

Relinquish

call into question

deserted

protection / because

As far as I am concerned

thickets

doe

useless

Exit [DEMETRIUS, HELENA following him]
245 OBERON Fare thee well, nymph. Ere he do leave this grove
Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love.
Enter [ROBIN GOODFELLOW the] puck
Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.
ROBIN Ay, there it is.
OBERON I pray thee give it me.
I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
250 Where oxlips⁵ and the nodding violet grows,
Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,^o
With sweet musk-roses,⁶ and with eglantine.^o
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;
255 And there the snake throws^o her enamelled skin,
Weed^o wide enough to wrap a fairy in;
And with the juice of this I'll streak^o her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove.
260 A sweet Athenian lady is in love
With a disdainful youth. Anoint his eyes;
But do it when the next thing he espies
May be the lady. Thou shalt know the man
By the Athenian garments he hath on.
265 Effect it with some care, that he may prove
More fond^o on her than she upon her love;
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.⁷
ROBIN Fear not, my lord. Your servant shall do so.

honeysuckle
sweetbrier, a type of rose

throws off; casts
Garment
anoint

doting

separately

2.2

Enter TITANIA, Queen of Fairies, with her train

TITANIA Come, now a roundel^o and a fairy song,
2 Then for the third part of a minute¹ hence:
Some to kill cankers^o in the musk-rose buds,
Some war with reremice^o for their leathern wings
5 To make my small elves coats, and some keep back
The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots and wonders
At our quaint^o spirits. Sing me now asleep;
Then to your offices, and let me rest.
[She lies down.] FAIRIES sing
FIRST FAIRY You spotted snakes with double^o tongue,
10 Thomy hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blindworms,² do no wrong;
Come not near our Fairy Queen.
CHORUS [dancing] Philomel³ with melody,
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
15 Lulla, lulla, lullaby; lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Never harm
Nor spell nor charm

circular dance

caterpillars
bats

dainty

forked

5. Hybrid between primrose and cowslip.

6. Large rambling white roses.

7. Some spirits were thought unable to bear daylight (compare *Hamlet* 1.1.28–36).

2.2 Location: The wood.

1. The fairies are quick enough to do their tasks in twenty

seconds.

2. Newts (water lizards) and blindworms were thought to be poisonous, as were spiders (line 20).

3. Philomel, the nightingale (in classical myth, a woman who, raped by her sister's husband, was transformed into a bird).

20 FIRST FAIRY Come our lovely lady nigh.
So good night, with lullaby.
Weaving spiders, come not here;
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence;
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail do no offence.
25 CHORUS [*dancing*] Philomel with melody,
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby; lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Never harm
Nor spell nor charm
Come our lovely lady nigh.
30 So good night, with lullaby.

[TITANIA] *sleeps*

SECOND FAIRY Hence, away. Now all is well.
One aloof° stand sentinel.

[*Exeunt all but TITANIA and the sentinel*]

Enter OBERON. [*He drops the juice on Titania's eyelids*]

OBERON What thou seest when thou dost wake,

35 Do it for thy true love take;
Love and languish for his sake.
Be it ounce,° or cat, or bear,
Pard,° or boar with bristled hair,
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.

40 Wake when some vile thing is near.

[*Exit*]

Enter LYSANDER and HERMIA

LYSANDER Fair love, you faint with wand'ring in the wood,
And, to speak truth, I have forgot our way.
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

45 HERMIA Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed;
For I upon this bank will rest my head.

[*She lies down*]

LYSANDER One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;
One heart, one bed; two bosoms, and one troth.°

HERMIA Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,
50 Lie further off yet; do not lie so near.

LYSANDER O, take the sense,° sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conference⁴—

I mean that my heart unto yours is knit,
So that but one heart we can make of it.
55 'Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath;
So, then, two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny;
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.⁵

HERMIA Lysander riddles very prettily.

60 Now much beshrew⁶ my manners and my pride
If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy,
Lie further off, in humane° modesty.

at a distance

*lynx
Leopard*

pledged faith

true meaning

courteous

65 Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,
So far be distant; and good night, sweet friend.
'Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end.

LYSANDER Amen, amen, to that fair prayer say I;
And then end life when I end loyalty.

70 Here is my bed; sleep give thee all his rest.

[*He lies down*]

HERMIA With half that wish the wisher's eyes be pressed.⁷

They sleep [apart.]

Enter [ROBIN GOODFELLOW *the*] PUCK

ROBIN Through the forest have I gone,

But Athenian found I none

On whose eyes I might approve°

75 This flower's force in stirring love.

Night and silence. Who is here?

Weeds of Athens he doth wear.

This is he my master said

Despised the Athenian maid—

80 And here the maiden, sleeping sound

On the dank and dirty ground.

Pretty soul, she durst not lie

Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.

Churl,° upon thy eyes I throw

85 All the power this charm doth owe.°

[*He drops the juice on Lysander's eyelids*]

When thou wak'st, let love forbid

Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.⁸

So, awake when I am gone.

For I must now to Oberon.

Exit

Enter DEMETRIUS and HELENA, running

90 HELENA Stay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS I charge thee hence, and do not haunt me thus.

HELENA O, wilt thou darkling° leave me? Do not so.

DEMETRIUS Stay, on thy peril;° I alone will go.

Exit

HELENA O, I am out of breath in this fond° chase.

95 The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace.°

Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies;

For she hath blessèd and attractive° eyes.

How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears—

If so, my eyes are oft'ner washed than hers.

100 No, no; I am as ugly as a bear,

For beasts that meet me run away for fear.

Therefore no marvel though Demetrius

Do, as° a monster, fly my presence thus.

What wicked and dissembling glass of mine

105 Made me compare° with Hermia's sphery eyne!°

But who is here? Lysander, on the ground?

Dead, or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.

Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.

LYSANDER [*awaking*] And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.

110 Transparent¹ Helena, nature shows art°

skill; magic power

4. Love enables lovers truly to understand one another.

6. Curse (used in a mild sense).

5. Deceive; punning on "lie down."

7. May sleep's rest be shared between us. *pressed*: closed in sleep.

8. *forbid* . . . *eyelid*: prevent you from sleeping.

9. Stay here or risk peril (if you follow me).

1. Radiant; capable of being seen through.

That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.
Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word
Is that vile name to perish on my sword!

HELENA Do not say so, Lysander; say not so.

115 What though he love your Hermia? Lord, what though?
Yet Hermia still loves you; then be content.

LYSANDER Content with Hermia? No, I do repent
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.
Not Hermia but Helena I love.

120 Who will not change a raven for a dove?
The will of man is by his reason swayed,²
And reason says you are the worthier maid.
Things growing are not ripe until their season,
So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.
125 And, touching now the point of human skill,³
Reason becomes the marshal⁴ to my will,
And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook^o
Love's stories written in love's richest book.

look over; read

HELENA Wherefore was I to this keen^o mockery born?

sharp

130 When at your hands did I deserve this scorn?
Is't not enough, is't not enough, young man,
That I did never—no, nor never can—
Deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye,
But you must flout my insufficiency?⁵
135 Good troth,^o you do me wrong; good sooth,^o you do,
In such disdainful manner me to woo.
But fare you well. Perforce I must confess
I thought you lord of more true gentleness.^o
O, that a lady of one man refused
140 Should of^o another therefore be abused! Exit

Truly / indeed

courtesy; breeding

by

LYSANDER She sees not Hermia. Hermia, sleep thou there,
And never mayst thou come Lysander near;
For as a surfeit of the sweetest things
The deepest loathing to the stomach brings,
145 Or as the heresies that men do leave
Are hated most of those they did deceive,⁶
So thou, my surfeit and my heresy,
Of all be hated, but the most of me;
And all my powers, address^o your love and might
150 To honour Helen, and to be her knight. Exit

direct; apply

HERMIA [awaking] Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity. What a dream was here?
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
155 Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.^o
Lysander—what, removed? Lysander, lord—
What, out of hearing, gone? No sound, no word?
Alack, where are you? Speak an if^o you hear,
160 Speak, of^o all loves. I swoon almost with fear.

an if=if
for the sake of

No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately.

Exit

3.1

Enter the clowns:^o [QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE,
SNOUT, and STARVELING]

rustics

BOTTOM Are we all met?

QUINCE Pat,^o pat; and here's a marvellous convenient place for
our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn
brake^o our tiring-house,^o and we will do it in action as we will
do it before the Duke.

On the dot

thicket / dressing room

5 BOTTOM Peter Quince?

QUINCE What sayst thou, bully^o Bottom?

good fellow; jolly

BOTTOM There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and
Thisbe that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword
10 to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you
that?

SNOUT By'r la'kin,¹ a parlous^o fear.

perilous

STARVELING I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is
done.²

15 BOTTOM Not a whit. I have a device to make all well. Write me
a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no
harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed;
and for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus,
am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them
out of fear.

QUINCE Well, we will have such a prologue; and it shall be writ-
ten in eight and six.³

BOTTOM No, make it two more: let it be written in eight and
eight.

25 SNOUT Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM Masters, you ought to consider with yourself, to bring
in—God shield us—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful
thing;⁴ for there is not a more fearful^o wild fowl than your lion
30 living, and we ought to look to't.

frightening

SNOUT Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must
be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak
through, saying thus or to the same defect:^o 'ladies', or 'fair
ladies, I would wish you' or 'I would request you' or 'I would
35 entreat you not to fear, not to tremble. My life for yours.⁵ If you
think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of^o my life. No, I am
no such thing. I am a man, as other men are'—and there,
indeed, let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is
Snug the joiner.

(for "effect")

a threat to

40 QUINCE Well, it shall be so; but there is two hard things: that is,
to bring the moonlight into a chamber—for you know Pyramus
and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

2. Renaissance psychology considered the will (that is, the passions) to be in constant conflict with, and ideally subject to, the faculty of reason.
3. Reaching (only) now the highest point of human judgment.

4. Officer who led guests to their appointed places.
5. *flout my insufficiency*: mock my shortcomings by pretending they are wonderful qualities.
6. *as the heresies . . . deceive*: as men most hate the false opinions they once held.

3.1 Location: Remains the same, although F introduces an act break.

1. By our ladykin (Virgin Mary): a mild oath.

2. When all is said and done.

3. Alternate lines of eight and six syllables (a common ballad measure).

4. In 1594, at a feast in honor of the christening of King James's son, a tame lion that was supposed to draw a chariot was replaced by a black African in order to avoid frightening the audience.

5. I pledge my life to defend yours.

SNOUT⁶ Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?
 45 BOTTOM A calendar, a calendar—look in the almanac, find out moonshine, find out moonshine.
Enter [ROBIN GOODFELLOW⁷ the] puck [invisible]
 QUINCE *[with a book]*⁸ Yes, it doth shine that night.
 BOTTOM Why, then may you leave a casement of the great chamber window where we play open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.
 50 QUINCE Ay, or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern and say he comes to disfigure,⁹ or to present,¹⁰ the person of Moonshine. 'Then there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisbe, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.
 55 SNOUT You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?
 BOTTOM Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast¹ about him, to signify 'wall'; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.
 60 QUINCE If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake; and so everyone according to his cue.
 65 ROBIN *[aside]* What hempen homespuns² have we swagg'ring here
 So near the cradle of the Fairy Queen?
 What, a play toward?³ I'll be an auditor—
 An actor, too, perhaps, if I see cause.
 QUINCE Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, stand forth.
 70 BOTTOM *[as Pyramus]* Thisbe, the flowers of odious⁴ savours sweet.
 QUINCE Odours, odours.
 BOTTOM *[as Pyramus]* Odours savours sweet
 So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.
 But hark, a voice. Stay thou but here a while,
 And by and by I will to thee appear. *Exit*
 75 ROBIN³ *[aside]* A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here. *[Exit]*
 FLUTE Must I speak now?
 QUINCE Ay, marry must you. For you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.
 80 FLUTE *[as Thisbe]* Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
 Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier;
 Most bristly juvenile,⁵ and eke⁶ most lovely Jew,⁴
 As true as truest horse that yet would never tire:
 I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's⁵ tomb.
 85 QUINCE Ninus⁵ tomb, man!—Why, you must not speak that yet. That you answer to Pyramus. You speak all your part at

6. Or Smug: Q2, F abbreviate as "Sn."

7. Robin's entrance here (in F only) is also noted (in both F and Q) at line 65.

8. The book, perhaps comically supplied by Robin, is an editorial conjecture.

9. Blunder for "figure," represent *bush of thorns*: bundle of thorn-bush kindling (like the lantern, a traditional accessory of the man in the moon).

1. Mixture of lime and gravel used to plaster outside walls.

2. Peasants, country bumpkins, dressed in coarse homespun fabric made from hemp.

3. Q gives this line to Quince.

4. Not often considered "lovely" by Elizabethan Christians; usually a term of abuse (here echoing the first syllable of "juvenile").

5. Mythical founder of Nineveh, whose wife, Semiramis, was believed to have founded Babylon, the setting for the story of Pyramus and Thisbe.

once, cues and all.—Pyramus, enter: your cue is past; it is 'never tire'.

FLUTE O.

90 *[As Thisbe]* As true as truest horse that yet would never tire.

[Enter ROBIN leading BOTTOM with the ass-head]

BOTTOM *[as Pyramus]* If I were fair,⁶ Thisbe, I were⁷ only thine.

handsome / would be

QUINCE O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray, masters; fly, masters: help!

The clowns all exeunt

ROBIN I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,⁸

in circles

95 Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.

Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,

A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,⁹

will-o'-the-wisp

And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,

Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn. *Exit*

Enter [BOTTOM⁶ again,] with the ass-head

100 BOTTOM Why do they run away? 'This is a knavery of them to make me afraid.

Enter SNOUT

SNOUT O Bottom, thou art changed. What do I see on thee?

BOTTOM What do you see? You see an ass-head of your own,⁷ do you? *[Exit SNOUT]*

Enter QUINCE

105 QUINCE Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated.⁸

transformed

Exit

BOTTOM I see their knavery. 'This is to make an ass of me, to fright me, if they could; but I will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

110 *[Sings]* The ousel cock⁹ so black of hue,

male blackbird

With orange-tawny bill;

The throstle⁹ with his note so true;

song thrush

The wren with little quill.⁹

reed pipe

TITANIA *[awaking]* What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?

115 BOTTOM *[sings]* The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,

The plainsong⁸ cuckoo grey,

Whose note full many a man doth mark,

And dar's not answer 'Nay'⁹—

for indeed, who would set his wit to¹⁰ so foolish a bird? Who would give a bird the lie,¹ though he cry 'Cuckoo' never so?²

*pay heed to
ever so much*

TITANIA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.

Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note;

So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;

And thy fair virtue's force² perforce doth move me

125 On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays—the more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends. Nay, I can gleek³ upon occasion.

make jokes

130 TITANIA Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

6. He might have remained onstage when the others left. Entrance noted in F only.

7. You see a figment of your own asinine imagination.

8. A melody sung without adornment; the repeated

"cuckoo" (associated with cuckoldry).

9. Deny (that he is a cuckold).

1. Who would call a bird a liar.

2. Your patience; power of your good qualities.

BOTTOM Not so, neither, but if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.³

TITANIA Out of this wood do not desire to go.

135 Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.
I am a spirit of no common rate:⁴
The summer still⁵ doth tend upon my state;³
And I do love thee. Therefore go with me.
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
140 And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;
And I will purge thy mortal grossness⁶ so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.
Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed!

Enter four fairies: PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTE,⁴ and MUSTARDSEED

A FAIRY Ready.

ANOTHER And I.

ANOTHER And I.

ANOTHER And I.

145 ALL FOUR Where shall we go?

TITANIA Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes.
Feed him with apricots and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
150 The honeybags steal from the humble-bees,⁷
And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs
And light them at the fiery glow-worms' eyes
To have⁸ my love to bed, and to arise;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
155 To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

A FAIRY Hail, mortal.

ANOTHER Hail.

ANOTHER Hail.

160 ANOTHER Hail.

BOTTOM I cry your worships mercy,⁵ heartily.—I beseech your worship's name.

COBWEB Cobweb.

BOTTOM I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good Master
165 Cobweb. If I cut my finger,⁶ I shall make bold with you.—Your name, honest gentleman?

PEASEBLOSSOM Peaseblossom.

BOTTOM I pray you commend me to Mistress Squash, your mother, and to Master Peascod,⁷ your father. Good Master
170 Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of more acquaintance, too.—Your name, I beseech you, sir?

MUSTARDSEED Mustardseed.

BOTTOM Good Master Mustardseed, I know your patience⁸ well.
That same cowardly giantlike ox-beef⁹ hath devoured many a
175 gentleman of your house. I promise you your kindred hath

purpose

rank
always, continually

fleshly being

bumblebees

lead

made my eyes water ere now. I desire you of more acquaintance, good Master Mustardseed.

TITANIA [to the fairies] Come, wait upon him, lead him to my bower.
The moon, methinks, looks with a wat'ry eye,
180 And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,¹
Lamenting some enforced² chastity.
Tie up my love's tongue;² bring him silently. Exeunt

violated; involuntary

3.2

Enter [OBERON,] King of Fairies

OBERON I wonder if Titania be awaked,
Then what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on in extremity.

Enter [ROBIN GOODFELLOW the] puck

Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit?

5 What nightrule³ now about this haunted grove?

ROBIN My mistress with a monster is in love.
Near to her close⁴ and consecrated bower
While she was in her dull⁵ and sleeping hour
A crew of patches,⁶ rude mechanicals⁷
10 That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,⁸
Were met together to rehearse a play
Intended for great 'Theseus' nuptial day.
The shallowest thickskin of that barren sort,⁹
Who Pyramus presented,⁹ in their sport
15 Forsook his scene⁹ and entered in a brake,
When I did him at this advantage take.
An ass's noll⁹ I fixèd on his head.
Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,
And forth my mimic⁹ comes. When they him spy—
20 As wild geese that the creeping fowler⁹ eye,
Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,¹
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever⁹ themselves and madly sweep the sky—
So, at his sight, away his fellows fly,
25 And at our stamp² here o'er and o'er one falls.
He⁹ 'Murder' cries, and help from Athens calls.
Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
Made senseless things begin to do them wrong.
For briers and thorns at their apparel snatch;
30 Some sleeves, some hats—from yielders all things catch.³
I led them on in this distracted fear,
And left sweet Pyramus translated there;
When in that moment, so it came to pass,
Titania waked and straightway loved an ass.

35 OBERON This falls out better than I could devise.
But hast thou yet latched⁹ the Athenian's eyes
With the love juice, as I did bid thee do?

ROBIN I took him sleeping; that is finished, too;
And the Athenian woman by his side,

night revels; sports

private

drowsy

fools / rough workmen
market stands

witless lot

acted

stage

noddle; head

burlesque actor
hunter of birds

Scatter

One (workman)

anointed

3. Serves me, as part of my royal retinue.

4. Speck. "Mote" and "moth" were pronounced alike.
The names of the fairy retinue all suggest tiny size.

5. I beg pardon of your honors.

6. Cobwebs were used to stop bleeding.

7. Ripe pea pod (called "your father" because it suggests "codpiece"). Squash: unripe pea pod.

8. What you have suffered with fortitude.

9. Because beef is often eaten with mustard.

1. Dew was thought to originate on the moon.

2. Bottom is perhaps making involuntary asinine noises.

3.2 Location: The wood.

1. Together, in a flock. russet-pated choughs: gray-headed

jackdaws.

2. Editors have wondered how a fairy's presumably tiny foot could cause the human to fall.

3. Everything robs the timid.

40 That° when he waked of force° she must be eyed.
Enter DEMETRIUS and HERMIA
 OBERON Stand close. This is the same Athenian.
 ROBIN This is the woman, but not this the man.
[They stand apart]
 DEMETRIUS O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
 Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.
 45 HERMIA Now I but chide, but I should use thee worse;
 For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse.
 If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
 Being o'er shoes° in blood, plunge in the deep,
 And kill me too.
 50 The sun was not so true unto the day
 As he to me. Would he have stolen away
 From sleeping Hermia? I'll believe as soon
 This whole° earth may be bored, and that the moon
 May through the centre creep, and so displease
 55 Her brother's noontide with th'Antipodes.⁴
 It cannot be but thou hast murdered him.
 So should a murderer look—so dead,° so grim.
 DEMETRIUS So should the murdered look; and so should I,
 Pierced through the heart with your stern cruelty.
 60 Yet you, the murderer, look as bright, as clear
 As yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere.°
 HERMIA What's this to my Lysander? Where is he?
 Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?
 DEMETRIUS I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.
 65 HERMIA Out, dog; out, cur. Thou driv'st me past the bounds
 Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him then?
 Henceforth be never numbered among men.
 O, once tell true; tell true, even for my sake.
 Durst thou have looked upon him being awake,
 70 And hast thou killed him sleeping? O brave touch!°
 Could not a worm,° an adder do so much?—
 An adder did it, for with doubler⁵ tongue
 Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.
 DEMETRIUS You spend your passion on a misprised mood.°
 75 I am not guilty of Lysander's blood,
 Nor is he dead, for aught that I can tell.
 HERMIA I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.
 DEMETRIUS And if I could, what should I get therefor?°
 HERMIA A privilege never to see me more;
 80 And from thy hated presence part I so.
 See me no more, whether he be dead or no
 DEMETRIUS There is no following her in this fierce vein.
 Here therefore for a while I will remain.
 So sorrow's heaviness⁶ doth heavier grow.
 85 For debt that bankrupt sleep doth sorrow owe,⁷
 Which now in some slight measure it will pay,

So that / necessity

Having waded so far

solid

deathly pale

orbit

noble stroke
serpent

in misconceived anger

for that

Exit

4. that . . . Antipodes: that the moon could creep through a hole bored through the earth's center and emerge on the other side, the Antipodes, displeasing the inhabitants by displacing the noontime sun with the darkness of night (Apollo, the sun god, was the brother of Diana, the moon goddess.)

5. More forked (of the adder); more duplicitous (of Demetrius).

6. Sadness (punning on "heavy": drowsy).

7. For . . . owe: Because of the sleeplessness sorrow causes.

If for his tender here I make some stay.⁸
[He lies] down [and sleeps]
 OBERON *[to ROBIN]* What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite,
 And laid the love juice on some true love's sight.
 90 Of thy misprision° must perforce ensue
 Some true love turned, and not a false turned true.
 ROBIN Then fate o'errules, that, one man holding troth,°
 A million fail, confounding oath on oath.⁹
 OBERON About the wood go swifter than the wind,
 95 And Helena of Athens look° thou find.
 All fancy-sick° she is, and pale of cheer°
 With sighs of love that costs the fresh blood dear.¹
 By some illusion see thou bring her here.
 I'll charm his eyes against° she do appear.
 100 ROBIN I go, I go—look how I go,
 Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.²
Exit
 OBERON Flower of this purple dye,
 Hit with Cupid's archery,
 Sink in apple° of his eye.
[He drops the juice on Demetrius' eyelids]
 105 When his love he doth espy,
 Let her shine as gloriously
 As the Venus of the sky.
 When thou wak'st, if she be by,
 Beg of her for remedy.
Enter [ROBIN GOODFELLOW the] puck
 110 ROBIN Captain of our fairy band,
 Helena is here at hand,
 And the youth mistook by me,
 Pleading for a lover's fee.°
 Shall we their fond° pageant see?
 115 Lord, what fools these mortals be!
 OBERON Stand aside. The noise they make
 Will cause Demetrius to awake.
 ROBIN Then will two at once woo one.
 That must needs be sport alone;°
 120 And those things do best please me
 That befall prepost'rously.°
[They stand apart.]
Enter HELENA, LYSANDER [following her]
 LYSANDER Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?
 Scorn and derision never come in tears.
 Look when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
 125 In their nativity all truth appears.³
 How can these things in me seem scorn to you,
 Bearing the badge of faith⁴ to prove them true?
 HELENA You do advance° your cunning more and more,
 When truth kills truth⁵—O devilish holy fray!
 130 These vows are Hermia's. Will you give her o'er?

mistake

faith

be sure

lovesick / face

in readiness for when

pupil

reward

foolish

unique

ass-backward

8. Which . . . stay: I will rest here awhile to give sleep the opportunity to pay off some of its debt to sorrow.

9. Among the millions of faithless men, the one true man's oath has been subverted by fate.

1. Sighs were thought to cause loss of blood.

2. Tartars, a dark-skinned, supposedly savage people in

Asia Minor, were famed for their archery.

3. Look . . . appear: The fact that I am weeping authenticates my vow's sincerity.

4. Insignia, such as worn on a servant's livery (here, his tears).

5. When one vow nullifies another.

- Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.⁶
 Your vows to her and me put in two scales
 Will even weigh, and both as light as tales.^o
- LYSANDER I had no judgement when to her I swore.
- 135 HELENA Nor none, in my mind, now you give her o'er.
- LYSANDER Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.
- HELENA⁷ [*awaking*] O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!
 To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
- 140 Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show^o
 Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!
 That pure congealèd white—high Taurus⁸ snow,
 Fanned with the eastern wind—turns to a crow⁹.
 When thou hold'st up thy hand. O, let me kiss
- 145 This princess of pure white, this seal^o of bliss!
- HELENA O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent
 To set against me for your merriment.
 If you were civil, and knew courtesy,
 You would not do me thus much injury.
- 150 Can you not hate me—as I know you do—
 But you must join in souls to mock me too?
 If you were men, as men you are in show,
 You would not use a gentle^o lady so,
 To vow and swear and superpraise my parts^o
- 155 When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.
 You both are rivals and love Hermia,
 And now both rivals to mock Helena.
 A trim^o exploit, a manly enterprise—
 To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes
 With your derision. None of noble sort^o
 Would so offend a virgin, and extort^o
 A poor soul's patience, all to make you sport.
- LYSANDER You are unkind, Demetrius. Be not so.
 For you love Hermia; this you know I know.
- 165 And here with all good will, with all my heart,
 In Hermia's love I yield you up my part;
 And yours of Helena to me bequeath,
 Whom I do love, and will do till my death.
- HELENA Never did mockers waste more idle breath.
- 170 DEMETRIUS Lysander, keep thy Hermia. I will none.¹
 If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.
 My heart to her but as guestwise^o sojourned
 And now to Helen is it home returned,
 There to remain.
- LYSANDER Helen, it is not so.
- 175 DEMETRIUS Disparage not the faith thou dost not know,
 Lest to thy peril thou aby it dear.^o
- Enter* HERMIA
- Look where thy love comes; yonder is thy dear.
- HERMIA Dark night, that from the eye his^o function takes,
 The ear more quick of apprehension makes.

lies; fiction

appearance

pledge

well-born; mild
overpraise my qualities

fine

rank; nature
torture

as a guest

pay for it dearly

its

- 180 Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,
 It pays the hearing double recompense.
 Thou art not by mine eye, Lysander, found;
 Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound.
 But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?
- 185 LYSANDER Why should he stay whom love doth press to go?
- HERMIA What love could press Lysander from my side?
- LYSANDER Lysander's love, that would not let him bide:
 Fair Helena, who more engilds the night
 Than all yon fiery O's and eyes of light.²
- 190 Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know
 The hate I bare thee made me leave thee so?
- HERMIA You speak not as you think. It cannot be.
- HELENA [*aside*] Lo, she is one of this confederacy.
 Now I perceive they have conjoined all three
 To fashion this false sport in spite of^o me. —
- 195 Injurious Hermia, most ungrateful maid,
 Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
 To bait³ me with this foul derision?
 Is all the counsel^o that we two have shared —
- 200 The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent
 When we have chid the hasty-footed time
 For parting us—O, is all quite forgot?
 All schooldays' friendship, childhood innocence?
 We, Hermia, like two artificial gods
- 205 Have with our needles created both one flower,
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
 As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds
 Had been incorporate.^o So we grew together,
- 210 Like to a double cherry: seeming parted,
 But yet an union in partition,
 Two lovely berries moulded on one stem.
 So, with two seeming bodies but one heart,
 Two of the first⁴—like coats in heraldry,
 215 Due but to one and crownèd with one crest.
 And will you rend our ancient love asunder,
 To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
 It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly.
 Our sex as well as I may chide you for it,
 220 Though I alone do feel the injury.
- HERMIA I am amazèd at your passionate words.
 I scorn you not. It seems that you scorn me.
- HELENA Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn,
 To follow me, and praise my eyes and face?
 225 And made your other love, Demetrius—
 Who even but now^o did spurn me with his foot—
 To call me goddess, nymph, divine, and rare,
 Precious, celestial? Wherefore speaks he this
 To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander
 230 Deny your love so rich within his soul,

to spite

confidences

of one body

6. you . . . weigh: you will find that neither oath has any substance; you, Lysander, will be found to have no substance.

7. Helena's retort, awakening Demetrius, may have been

inadvertently omitted by the Q and F texts.

8. Range of high mountains in Asia Minor.

9. turns to a crow: appears black by contrast.

1. I will have nothing to do with her.

2. Stars (punning on the vowels and on lovers' exclamatory "oh"s and "ay"s). An "o" was a spangle.

3. To torment (as Elizabethans set dogs to bait a bear).

4. A technical phrase in heraldry, referring to the first

quartering in a coat of arms, which may be repeated. The friends then have two bodies but a single, overarching identity.

And tender^o me, forsooth, affection,
 But by your setting on, by your consent?
 What though I be not so in grace^o as you,
 So hung upon with love, so fortunate,
 235 But miserable most, to love unloved —
 This you should pity rather than despise.
 HERMIA I understand not what you mean by this.
 HELENA Ay, do. Persever, counterfeit sad^o looks,
 Make mouths upon^o me when I turn my back,
 240 Wink each at other, hold the sweet jest up;^o
 This sport well carried shall be chronicled.
 If you have any pity, grace, or manners,
 You would not make me such an argument.^o
 But fare ye well. 'Tis partly my own fault,
 245 Which death or absence soon shall remedy.
 LYSANDER Stay, gentle Helena, hear my excuse,
 My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!
 HELENA O excellent!
 HERMIA [to LYSANDER] Sweet, do not scorn her so.
 DEMETRIUS [to LYSANDER] If she cannot entreat I can compel.⁵
 250 LYSANDER Thou canst compel no more than she entreat.
 Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers. —
 Helen, I love thee; by my life I do.
 I swear by that which I will lose for thee
 To prove him false that says I love thee not.
 255 DEMETRIUS [to HELENA] I say I love thee more than he can do.
 LYSANDER If thou say so, withdraw,⁶ and prove it too.
 DEMETRIUS Quick, come.
 HERMIA Lysander, whereto tends all this?
 [She takes him by the arm]
 LYSANDER Away, you Ethiop.⁷
 DEMETRIUS No, no, sir, yield.^o
 260 Seem to break loose, take on as^o you would follow,
 But yet come not. You are a tame man; go.
 LYSANDER [to HERMIA] Hang off,^o thou cat, thou burr, vile thing, let loose,
 Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent.
 HERMIA Why are you grown so rude? What change is this,
 Sweet love?
 LYSANDER Thy love? Out, tawny Tartar, out;
 265 Out, loathed med'cine;⁸ O hated potion, hence.
 HERMIA Do you not jest?
 HELENA Yes, sooth,^o and so do you.
 LYSANDER Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.
 DEMETRIUS I would I had your bond, for I perceive
 A weak bond⁹ holds you. I'll not trust your word.
 270 LYSANDER What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?
 Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.
 HERMIA What, can you do me greater harm than hate?
 Hate me—wherefore? O me, what news,^o my love?
 Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?

5. If Hermia cannot entreat you to stop, I can make you do it.

6. Come with me ("step outside").

7. Allusion to Hermia's dark hair and complexion. Elizabethans generally regarded light complexions as more

beautiful than dark and often stigmatized dark-skinned peoples (such as Ethiopians or Tartars) as ugly.

8. Any drug (including poison).

9. Hermia's weak grasp (with a pun on "bond": oath, in the previous line).

I am as fair now as I was erewhile.^o
 275 Since night you loved me, yet since night you left me.
 Why then, you left me—O, the gods forbid—
 In earnest, shall I say?
 LYSANDER Ay, by my life,
 And never did desire to see thee more.
 280 Therefore be out of hope, of question, doubt.
 Be certain, nothing truer; 'tis no jest
 That I do hate thee and love Helena.
 HERMIA [to HELENA] O me, you juggler,^o you canker blossom,¹
 You thief of love—what, have you come by night
 And stol'n my love's heart from him?
 285 HELENA Fine, i'faith.
 Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
 No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
 Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
 Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet,² you!
 290 HERMIA Puppet? Why, so! Ay, that way goes the game.
 Now I perceive that she hath made compare
 Between our statures; she hath urged her height,
 And with her personage, her tall personage,
 Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him—
 295 And are you grown so high in his esteem
 Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
 How low am I, thou painted maypole?³ Speak,
 How low am I? I am not yet so low
 But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.
 HELENA [to DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER] I pray you, though you
 300 mock me, gentlemen,
 Let her not hurt me. I was never curst.^o
 I have no gift at all in shrewishness.
 I am a right^o maid for my cowardice.
 Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think
 305 Because she is something^o lower than myself
 That I can match her—
 HERMIA Lower? Hark again.
 HELENA Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
 I evermore did love you, Hermia,
 Did ever keep your counsels, never wronged you—
 310 Save that in love unto Demetrius
 I told him of your stealth^o unto this wood.
 He followed you; for love I followed him.
 But he hath chid me hence, and threatened me
 To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me too.
 315 And now, so^o you will let me quiet go,
 To Athens will I bear my folly back,
 And follow you no further. Let me go.
 You see how simple and how fond^o I am.
 HERMIA Why, get you gone. Who is't that hinders you?
 320 HELENA A foolish heart that I leave here behind.
 HERMIA What, with Lysander?

1. Worm that devours blossoms (of love).

2. Fraudulent imitation; but Hermia interprets "puppet" as a reference to her height.

3. Proverbial for someone tall and skinny. *painted*: insulting allusion to the use of cosmetics.

HELENA With Demetrius.
 LYSANDER Be not afraid; she shall not harm thee, Helena.
 DEMETRIUS No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.
 HELENA O, when she is angry she is keen^o and shrewd.^o
 325 She was a vixen when she went to school,
 And though she be but little, she is fierce.
 HERMIA Little again? Nothing but 'low' and 'little'?—
 Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
 Let me come to her.
 LYSANDER Get you gone, you dwarf,
 330 You *minimus* of hind'ring knot-grass⁴ made;
 You bead, you acorn.
 DEMETRIUS You are too officious
 In her behalf that scorns your services.
 Let her alone. Speak not of Helena.
 Take not her part. For if thou dost intend
 335 Never so little show of love to her,
 Thou shalt aby^o it.
 LYSANDER Now she holds me not.
 Now follow, if thou dar'st, to try whose right,
 Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.
 DEMETRIUS Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.⁵
Exeunt LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS
 340 HERMIA You, mistress, all this coil^o is long^o of you.
 Nay, go not back.
 HELENA I will not trust you, I,
 Nor longer stay in your curst company.
 Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray;^o
 My legs are longer, though, to run away.
 345 HERMIA I am amazed, and know not what to say.
[Exit]
Exit
 OBERON and ROBIN *[come forward]*
 OBERON This is thy negligence. Still^o thou mistak'st,
 Or else commit'st thy knaveries wilfully.
 ROBIN Believe me, king of shadows,^o I mistook.
 Did not you tell me I should know the man
 350 By the Athenian garments he had on?—
 And so far^o blameless proves my enterprise
 That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes;
 And so far am I glad it so did sort^o
 As^o this their jangling^o I esteem a sport.
 355 OBERON Thou seest these lovers seek a place to fight.
 Hie^o therefore, Robin, overcast the night;
 The starry welkin^o cover thou anon
 With drooping fog as black as Acheron,^o
 And lead these testy rivals so astray
 360 As^o one come not within another's way.
 Like to Lysander sometime frame thy tongue,
 Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong;^o
 And sometime rail thou like Demetrius,
 And from each other look thou lead them thus
 365 Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep

With leaden legs and batty^o wings doth creep.
 Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye—
 Whose liquor hath this virtuous^o property,
 370 To take from thence all error with his might,
 And make his eyeballs roll with wonted^o sight.
 When they next wake, all this derision^o
 Shall seem a dream and fruitless^o vision,
 And back to Athens shall the lovers wend^o
 With league^o whose date^o till death shall never end.
 375 Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
 I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
 And then I will her charmèd^o eye release
 From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.
 ROBIN My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
 380 For night's swift dragons⁶ cut the clouds full fast,
 And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,⁷
 At whose approach ghosts, wand'ring here and there,
 Troop home to churchyards; damnèd spirits all
 That in cross-ways and floods⁸ have burial
 385 Already to their wormy beds are gone,
 For fear lest day should look their shames upon.
 They wilfully themselves exiled from light,
 And must for aye^o consort with black-browed night.
 OBERON But we are spirits of another sort.
 390 I with the morning's love⁹ have oft made sport,
 And like a forester¹ the groves may tread
 Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,
 Opening on Neptune^o with fair blessed beams
 Turns into yellow gold his salt^o green streams.
 395 But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay;
 We may effect this business yet ere day.
[Exit]
 ROBIN Up and down, up and down,
 I will lead them up and down.
 I am feared in field and town.
 400 Goblin,^o lead them up and down.
 Here comes one.
Enter LYSANDER
 LYSANDER Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.
 ROBIN *[shifting place]*² Here, villain, drawn^o and ready. Where
 art thou?
 LYSANDER I will be with thee straight.^o
 ROBIN *[shifting place]* Follow me then
 To plainer^o ground. *[Exit LYSANDER]*³
Enter DEMETRIUS
 405 DEMETRIUS *[shifting place]* Lysander, speak again.
 'Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?
 Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

4. Creeping binding weed (its sap was thought to stunt human growth). *minimus*: diminutive thing (Latin).
 5. Proverbial for "side by side."

6. Imagined as drawing the chariots of the goddess of night.

7. Herald of the goddess of dawn; the morning star.

8. In which the drowned were "buried," without Christian sacrament. *cross-ways*: crossroads (where suicides were buried, also without Christian sacrament). Robin is differentiating here between two types of spirits: those who wandered from their churchyard graves and those who have no proper resting place. These two types, both

ghosts of former humans; are differentiated in turn from the fairy spirits by Oberon in the ensuing lines.

9. The love of Aurora, goddess of dawn (or Cephalus, a brave hunter, Aurora's lover).

1. Keeper of a royal forest or private park.

2. In F, this direction is placed in the margin in the middle of this episode. (In what follows, Robin presumably mimics the voices of Demetrius and Lysander.)

3. He might instead wander about the stage.

ROBIN [*shifting place*] Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars,
Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars,
410 And wilt not come? Come, recreant,^o come, thou child,
I'll whip thee with a rod. He is defiled
That draws a sword on thee.

DEMETRIUS [*shifting place*] Yea, art thou there?

ROBIN [*shifting place*] Follow my voice; we'll try^o no manhood here.

Exeunt

3.3

[*Enter LYSANDER*]

LYSANDER He goes before me, and still dares me on;
When I come where he calls, then he is gone.
The villain is much lighter heeled than I;
I followed fast, but faster he did fly,
5 That^o fallen am I in dark uneven way,
And here will rest me.

[*He lies*] down

Come, thou gentle day;

For if but once thou show me thy grey light,
I'll find Demetrius, and revenge this spite. [*He sleeps*]

Enter ROBIN [GOODFELLOW] and DEMETRIUS

ROBIN [*shifting place*] Ho, ho, ho, coward, why com'st thou not?

10 DEMETRIUS Abide^o me if thou dar'st, for well I wot^o

Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place,
And dar'st not stand nor look me in the face.

Where art thou now?

ROBIN [*shifting place*] Come hither, I am here.

DEMETRIUS Nay, then thou mock'st me. Thou shalt buy^o this
dear^o

15 If ever I thy face by daylight see.

Now go thy way. Faintness constraineth me
To measure out my length on this cold bed.

[*He lies down*]

By day's approach look to be visited.

[*He sleeps*]

Enter HELENA

HELENA O weary night, O long and tedious night,

20 Abate^o thy hours; shine comforts from the east

That I may back to Athens by daylight

From these that my poor company detest;

And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye,
Steal me a while from mine own company.

[*She lies down and sleeps*]

25 ROBIN Yet but three? Come one more,

Two of both kinds makes up four.

Enter HERMIA

Here she comes, curst^o and sad.

Cupid is a knavish lad

'Thus to make poor females mad.

30 HERMIA Never so weary, never so in woe,

Bedabbled^o with the dew, and torn with briers,

I can no further crawl, no further go.

My legs can keep no pace with my desires.

3.3 Location: Scene continues.

Here will I rest me till the break of day.

[*She lies down*]

35 Heavens shield Lysander, if they mean a fray.

[*She sleeps*]

ROBIN On the ground sleep sound.

I'll apply to your eye,

Gentle lover, remedy.

[*He drops the juice on Lysander's eyelids*]

When thou wak'st thou tak'st

True delight in the sight

Of thy former lady's eye,

And the country proverb known,

That 'every man should take his own',

In your waking shall be shown.

45 Jack shall have Jill,

Naught shall go ill,

the man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well. [*Exit*]

4.1

Enter [TITANIA,] *Queen of Fairies, and* [BOTTOM the
clown [*with the ass-head*], and fairies: [PEASEBLOSSOM,
COBWEB, MOTE, and MUSTARDSEED]

TITANIA [*to* BOTTOM] Come, sit thee down upon this flow'ry bed,

While I thy amiable^o cheeks do coy,^o

And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,

And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

5 BOTTOM Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.

BOTTOM Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Monsieur
Cobweb?

COBWEB Ready.

10 BOTTOM Monsieur Cobweb, good monsieur, get you your weap-
ons in your hand and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the
top of a thistle; and, good monsieur, bring me the honeybag.
Do not fret yourself too much in the action, monsieur; and,
good monsieur, have a care the honeybag break not. I would
15 be loath to have you overflowen with^o a honeybag, signor.

[*Exit* COBWEB]

Where's Monsieur Mustardseed?

MUSTARDSEED Ready.

BOTTOM Give me your neaf,^o Monsieur Mustardseed. Pray you,
leave your courtesy,¹ good monsieur.

20 MUSTARDSEED What's your will?

BOTTOM Nothing, good monsieur, but to help Cavalieri² Pease-
blossom³ to scratch. I must to the barber's, monsieur, for
methinks I am marvellous hairy about the face; and I am such
a tender ass, if my hair do but tickle me I must scratch.

25 TITANIA What, wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?

BOTTOM I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the
tongs and the bones.⁴

4.1 Location: The wood. The original text has no act break here. F has the four lovers sleep through the action onstage.
1. *leave your courtesy*: stop bowing, or do not stand bare-headed.
2. Blunder for "Cavalier," perhaps influenced by the Italian term *cavaliere*.
3. The early texts have "Cobweb" (Shakespeare's or the printer's error).
4. Triangle and clappers (rustic musical instruments).

coward; wretch

test

With the result that

Wait for I know

pay for
dearly

Shorten

angry

Sprinkled

lovable / caress

submerged by

fist

Rural music⁵

TITANIA Or say, sweet love, what thou desir'st to eat.

BOTTOM Truly, a peck of provender.⁶ I could munch your good30 dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle⁶ of hay.Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.⁶

TITANIA I have a venturous fairy that shall seek

The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee off new nuts.

BOTTOM I had rather have a handful or two of dried peas. But I

35 pray you, let none of your people stir me. I have an exposition
of⁶ sleep come upon me.

TITANIA Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.

Fairies, be gone, and be all ways⁶ away. [Exeunt fairies]So⁶ doth the woodbine⁶ the sweet honeysuckle

40 Gently entwine; the female ivy so

Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.

O how I love thee, how I dote on thee!

[They sleep.]

Enter ROBIN GOODFELLOW [the puck] and OBERON⁷

[King of Fairies, meeting]

OBERON Welcome, good Robin. Seest thou this sweet sight?

Her dotage now I do begin to pity,

45 For meeting her of late behind the wood,

Seeking sweet favours⁶ for this hateful fool,

I did upbraid her and fall out with her,

For she his hairy temples then had rounded

With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers,

50 And that same dew which sometime⁶ on the budsWas wont⁶ to swell like round and orient⁸ pearls

Stood now within the pretty flow'rets' eyes,

Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.

When I had at my pleasure taunted her,

55 And she in mild terms begged my patience,

I then did ask of her her changeling child,

Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent

To bear him to my bower in fairyland.

And now I have the boy, I will undo

60 This hateful imperfection of her eyes.

And, gentle puck, take this transformèd scalp

From off the head of this Athenian swain,

That he, awaking when the other⁶ do,

May all to Athens back again repair,

65 And think no more of this night's accidents

But as the fierce vexation of a dream.

But first I will release the Fairy Queen.

[He drops the juice on Titania's eyelids]

Be as thou wast wont to be,

See as thou wast wont to see.

70 Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower⁹

Hath such force and blessèd power.

fodder
bundle
equal

disposition to

in every direction

Thus

love tokens

formerly
accustomed

others

Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen.

TITANIA [awaking] My Oberon, what visions have I seen!

Methought I was enamoured of an ass.

OBERON There lies your love.

75 TITANIA How came these things to pass?

O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!

OBERON Silence a while. — Robin, take off this head. —

Titania, music call, and strike more dead

Than common sleep of all these five¹ the sense.

80 TITANIA Music, ho — music such as charmeth sleep.

Still⁶ music

ROBIN [taking the ass-head off BOTTOM] Now when thou wak'st

with thine own fool's eyes peep.

OBERON Sound music.

[The music changes]

Come, my queen, take hands with me,

And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.

[OBERON and TITANIA dance]

Now thou and I are new in amity,

85 And will tomorrow midnight solemnly

Dance in Duke Theseus' house, triumphantly,

And bless it to all fair prosperity.

There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be

Wedded with Theseus, all in jollity.

90 ROBIN Fairy King, attend and mark.

I do hear the morning lark.

OBERON Then, my queen, in silence sad

Trip we after night's² shade.We the globe can compass⁶ soon,

95 Swifter than the wand'ring moon.

TITANIA Come, my lord, and in our flight

Tell me how it came this night

That I sleeping here was found

With these mortals on the ground.

Exeunt [OBERON, TITANIA, and

ROBIN. The] sleepers lie still

Wind horns [within]. Enter THESEUS [with] EGEUS, HIP-

POLYTA, and all his train

100 THESEUS Go, one of you, find out the forester,

For now our observation³ is performed;And since we have the vanguard⁶ of the day,

My love shall hear the music of my hounds.

Uncouple⁴ in the western valley; let them go.

105 Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.

We will, fair Queen, up to the mountain's top,

And mark the musical confusion

Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

HIPPOLYTA I was with Hercules and Cadmus⁵ once110 When in a wood of Crete they bayed⁶ the bearWith hounds of Sparta.⁶ Never did I hear

Soft

orbit

earliest part

brought to bay

5. Probably background music, which continues during the following dialogue, rather than a separate musical interlude. The direction only occurs in F.

6. Here, "woodbine" cannot mean "honeysuckle" as it did at 2.1.251, and thus must refer to a different plant.

7. In Q, he enters earlier, unseen, with Titania and her

train.

8. Lustrous (the best pearls were from the Far East).

9. "Dian's bud," the herb of 2.1.184 and 3.2.367, is perhaps *agnus castus*, or chaste tree: said to preserve chastity and hence the antidote to "Cupid's flower," or the love-in-idleness of 2.1.166, etc.

1. The lovers and Bottom.

2. The obsolete genitive inflection.

3. "Observance to a morn of May," as at 1.1.167.

4. Release (the dogs, leashed in pairs).

5. Mythical founder of Thebes. (No source for the anecdote is known.)

6. Famous in antiquity as hunting dogs.

Such gallant chiding;⁷ for besides the groves,
 The skies, the fountains, every region near
 Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
 115 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.
 THESEUS My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
 So flewed,⁷ so sanded;⁸ and their heads are hung
 With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
 Crook-kneed, and dewlapped⁸ like Thessalian bulls,
 120 Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells;
 Each under each.⁹ A cry more tuneable¹
 Was never holla'd to nor cheered with horn
 In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.
 Judge when you hear: But soft,⁹ what nymphs are these?
 125 EGEUS My lord, this is my daughter here asleep,
 And this Lysander; this Demetrius is;
 This Helena, old Nedar's Helena.
 I wonder of their being here together.
 THESEUS No doubt they rose up early to observe
 130 The rite of May, and, hearing our intent,
 Came here in grace of our solemnity.⁹
 But speak, Egeus: is not this the day
 That Hermia should give answer of her choice?
 EGEUS It is, my lord.
 135 THESEUS Go bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.
 [Exit one]
 Shout within: wind horns. [The lovers] all start up
 Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine² is past.
 Begin these wood-birds but to couple now?
 LYSANDER Pardon, my lord.
 [The lovers kneel]
 THESEUS I pray you all stand up.
 [The lovers stand]
 [To DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER] I know you two are rival enemies.
 140 How comes this gentle concord in the world,
 That hatred is so far from jealousy³
 To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity?
 LYSANDER My lord, I shall reply amazedly,⁴
 Half sleep, half waking. But as yet, I swear,
 145 I cannot truly say how I came here,
 But as I think—for truly would I speak,
 And, now I do bethink me, so it is—
 I came with Hermia hither. Our intent
 Was to be gone from Athens where⁵ we might,
 150 Without⁶ the peril of the Athenian law—
 EGEUS [to THESEUS] Enough, enough, my lord, you have enough.
 I beg the law, the law upon his head.—
 They would have stol'n away, they would, Demetrius,
 Thereby to have defeated⁶ you and me—
 155 You of your wife, and me of my consent,
 Of my consent that she should be your wife.
 DEMETRIUS [to THESEUS] My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,

barking

sandy-colored

stop; look

ceremony

suspicion

confusedly

wherever
Outside

defrauded

7. Flews were large hanging, fleshy chaps.
 8. With hanging folds of skin under the neck (compare 2.1.50).
 9. matched . . . each: harmoniously matched in the pitch

of their barking, like a set of bells.
 1. A pack of hounds more well tuned.
 2. Birds were said to choose their mates on Valentine's Day.

Of this their purpose hither to this wood,
 And I in fury hither followed them,
 160 Fair Helena in fancy³ following me.
 But, my good lord, I wot not by what power—
 But by some power it is—my love to Hermia,
 Melted as the snow, seems to me now
 As the remembrance of an idle gaud⁴
 165 Which in my childhood I did dote upon,
 And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
 The object and the pleasure of mine eye
 Is only Helena. To her, my lord,
 Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia.
 But like in sickness³ did I loathe this food;
 170 But, as in health come to my natural taste,
 Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,
 And will for evermore be true to it.
 THESEUS Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.
 175 Of this discourse we more will hear anon.—
 Egeus, I will overbear your will,
 For in the temple by and by with us
 These couples shall eternally be knit.—
 And, for⁵ the morning now is something⁶ worn,
 180 Our purposed hunting shall be set aside.
 Away with us to Athens. Three and three,
 We'll hold a feast in great solemnity.
 Come, Hippolyta.

love

a worthless trinket

since / somewhat

Exit Duke [THESEUS with HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS,
 and all his train]

DEMETRIUS These things seem small and undistinguishable,
 185 Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.
 HERMIA Methinks I see these things with parted⁶ eye,
 When everything seems double.
 HELENA So methinks,
 And I have found Demetrius like a jewel,
 Mine own and not mine own.⁴
 DEMETRIUS It seems to me
 190 That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think
 The Duke was here and bid us follow him?
 HERMIA Yea, and my father.
 HELENA And Hippolyta.
 LYSANDER And he did bid us follow to the temple.
 DEMETRIUS Why then, we are awake. Let's follow him,
 195 And by the way let us recount our dreams. Exeunt lovers
 BOTTOM wakes
 BOTTOM When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My
 next is 'most fair Pyramus'. Heigh-ho.⁵ Peter Quince? Flute the
 bellows-mender? Snout the tinker? Starveling? God's my life!⁶
 Stolen hence, and left me asleep?—I have had a most rare
 200 vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what
 dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about⁶ t'expound this
 dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what.
 Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a

(perhaps a yawn)
 Good Lord

try

3. Only as a person does when ill or nauseated.
 4. Mine on the principle of "finders keepers," but once someone else's.

205 patched fool⁵ if he will offer^o to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report⁶ what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom,⁷ and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her^o death. *Exit*

4.2

Enter QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING

QUINCE Have you sent to Bottom's house? Is he come home yet?

STARVELING He cannot be heard of: Out of doubt he is transported.¹

5 FLUTE If he come not, then the play is marred. It goes not forward. Doth it?

QUINCE It is not possible. You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge^o Pyramus but he.

FLUTE No, he hath simply the best wit^o of any handicraft-man in Athens.

QUINCE Yea, and the best person,^o too; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.

FLUTE You must say 'paragon'. A paramour is, God bless us, a thing of naught.^o

Enter SNUG the joiner

15 SNUG Masters, the Duke is coming from the temple, and there is two or three lords and ladies more married. If our sport^o had gone forward we had all been made men.²

FLUTE O sweet bully Bottom! Thus hath he lost sixpence a day³ during his life. He could not have scaped sixpence a day. An^o the Duke had not given him sixpence a day for playing Pyramus, I'll be hanged. He would have deserved it. Sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing.

Enter BOTTOM

BOTTOM Where are these lads? Where are these hearts?^o

QUINCE Bottom! O most courageous⁴ day! O most happy hour!

25 BOTTOM Masters, I am to discourse wonders; but ask me not what. For if I tell you, I am no true Athenian. I will tell you everything right as it fell out.

QUINCE Let us hear, sweet Bottom.

BOTTOM Not a word of^o me. All that I will tell you is that the Duke hath dined. Get your apparel together, good strings^o to your beards, new ribbons to your pumps. Meet presently^o at the palace; every man look o'er his part. For the short and the long is, our play is preferred.^o In any case let Thisbe have clean linen, and let not him that plays the lion pare his nails, for they shall hang out for the lion's claws. And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath, and I do

venture

(Thisbe's?)

perform
intellect

looks

something wicked

entertainment

if

mates

out of
(to attach the beards)
immediately

recommended

not doubt but to hear them say it is a sweet comedy. No more words. Away, go, away! *Exeunt*

5.1

Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS,¹ and [attendant]

lords

HIPPOLYTA 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that^o these lovers speak of. *that which*

THESEUS More strange than true. I never may believe

These antique² fables, nor these fairy toys.^o *trifles*

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

5 Such shaping fantasies,^o that apprehend^o *imaginations / conceive*

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact.^o *composed*

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:

10 That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.³

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,

And as imagination bodies forth

15 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination

That if it would but apprehend some joy

20 It comprehends some bringer^o of that joy;

Or in the night, imagining some fear,^o

How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA But all the story of the night told over,

And all their minds transfigured so together,

25 More witnesseth than fancy's images,⁴

And grows to something of great constancy;^o

But howsoever,^o strange and admirable.^o *consistency
in any case / wondrous*

Enter lovers: LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HERMIA, and

HELENA

THESEUS Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.

Joy, gentle friends—joy and fresh days of love

Accompany your hearts.

30 LYSANDER More than to us

Wait in your royal walks, your board, your bed.

THESEUS Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have

To wear away this long age of three hours

Between our after-supper and bed-time?

35 Where is our usual manager of mirth?

What revels are in hand? Is there no play

To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?

Call Egeus.

EGEUS Here, mighty Theseus.

THESEUS Say, what abridgement⁵ have you for this evening?

5. Jester in a patchwork or motley costume.

6. *The eye . . . report*: burlesque of Scripture: "The eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" those things that God has prepared (1 Corinthians 2:9 [Bishops' Bible]).

7. Because it is unfathomable, has no substance (foundation).

tion).

4.2 Location: Athens.

1. Carried away (by the fairies); transformed.

2. *we . . . men*: our fortunes would have been made.

3. As a royal (and in those days valuable) pension.

4. Blunder for "brave," meaning "splendid."

5.1 Location: Athens. Theseus's palace.

1. Q does not call for Egeus, but gives all his speeches to Philostrate (the character briefly addressed in 1.1). P's substitution of Egeus here may be a mistake (the possible result of the same actor playing both parts in an early performance) or an attempt to incorporate the angry father

into the festive close.

2. Ancient; strange, grotesque (as in "antic").

3. In a gypsy's face. *Helen*: Helen of Troy.

4. *More . . . images*: Testifies to something more than mere figments of the imagination.

5. Pastime, something to make the evening seem shorter.

40 What masque, what music? How shall we beguile
The lazy time if not with some delight?

EGEUS There is a brief⁶ how many sports are ripe.

Make choice of which your highness will see first.

LYSANDER⁶ [reads] "The battle with the centaurs,⁷ to be sung

45 By an Athenian eunuch to the harp."

THESEUS We'll none of that. That have I told my love
In glory of my kinsman Hercules.⁸

LYSANDER [reads] "The riot of the tipsy bacchanals

Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage."⁹

50 THESEUS That is an old device,⁹ and it was played

When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

LYSANDER [reads] "The thrice-three muses mourning for the death
Of learning, late deceased in beggary."¹

THESEUS That is some satire, keen and critical,

55 Not sorting with⁹ a nuptial ceremony.

LYSANDER [reads] "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth."

THESEUS 'Merry' and 'tragical'? 'Tedious' and 'brief'?—

That is, hot ice and wondrous strange black² snow.

60 How shall we find the concord of this discord?

EGEUS A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,

Which is as 'brief' as I have known a play;

But by ten words, my lord, it is too long;

Which makes it 'tedious'; for in all the play

65 There is not one word apt, one player fitted.⁹

And 'tragical', my noble lord, it is,

For Pyramus therein doth kill himself;

Which when I saw rehearsed, I must confess,

Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears

70 The passion of loud laughter never shed.

THESEUS What are they that do play it?

EGEUS Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,

Which never laboured in their minds till now,

And now have toiled⁹ their unbreathed⁹ memories

75 With this same play against⁹ your nuptial.

THESEUS And we will hear it.

EGEUS No, my noble lord,

It is not for you. I have heard it over,

And it is nothing, nothing in the world,

Unless you can find sport in their intents

80 Extremely stretched,⁹ and conned⁹ with cruel pain

To do you service.

THESEUS I will hear that play;

For never anything can be amiss

When simpleness and duty tender it.

Go, bring them in; and take your places, ladies. [Exit EGEUS]

short list

show

befitting

appropriately cast

taxed / unexercised
in preparation for

strained / memorized

85 HIPPOLYTA I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,³

And duty in his service⁹ perishing.

its attempt to serve

THESEUS Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

HIPPOLYTA He says they can do nothing in this kind.⁹

kind of thing

THESEUS The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.

90 Our sport shall be to take what they mistake,

And what poor duty cannot do,

Noble respect⁹ takes it in might, not merit.⁴

consideration

Where I have come, great clerks⁹ have purposed

scholars

To greet me with premeditated welcomes,

95 Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,

Make periods in the midst of sentences,

Throttle their practised accent⁵ in their fears,

And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,

Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,

100 Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome,

And in the modesty of fearful⁹ duty

frightened

I read as much as from the rattling tongue

Of saucy and audacious eloquence.

Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity

105 In least speak most, to my capacity.⁹

in my judgment

[Enter EGEUS]

EGEUS So please your grace, the Prologue is addressed.⁶

THESEUS Let him approach.

Flourish trumpets. Enter [QUINCE as] the Prologue

QUINCE [as Prologue] If we offend, it is with our good will.

That you should think: we come not to offend

110 But with good will. To show our simple skill,

That is the true beginning of our end.

Consider then we come but in despite.

We do not come as minding⁹ to content you,

intending

Our true intent is. All for your delight

115 We are not here. That you should here repent you

The actors are at hand, and by their show

You shall know all that you are like to know.⁷

THESEUS This fellow doth not stand upon points.⁸

LYSANDER He hath rid his prologue like a rough⁹ colt: he knows

an unbroken

120 not the stop.⁹ A good moral, my lord: it is not enough to speak,

but to speak true.

HIPPOLYTA Indeed, he hath played on this prologue like a child

on a recorder¹—a sound, but not in government.⁹

control

THESEUS His speech was like a tangled chain—nothing⁹

not at all

125 impaired, but all disordered. Who is next?

Enter with a trumpeter before them [BOTTOM as] Pyramus, [FLUTE as] Thisbe, [SNOUT as] Wall, [STARVELING as] Moonshine, and [SNUG as] Lion [for the dumb show]²

6. In Q, Theseus both reads the list and comments on it himself.

7. Probably the battle that occurred when the Centaurs tried to carry off the bride of Theseus's friend Pirithous.

8. According to Plutarch, Hercules and Theseus were cousins.

9. The murder of the poet Orpheus by drunken women, devotees of Dionysus.

1. Possibly a topical reference: Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Kyd, university wits who began writing for the stage in the 1580s, all died in desperate circumstances in 1592–94. But satiric laments on the poverty of scholars and poets were commonplace.

2. "Black" is an editorial conjecture. Q and F omit a word that would make "snow" an oxymoron comparable to "hot ice."

3. Overburdened. *wretchedness*: incompetence or weakness; poor people.

4. *in . . . merit*: with respect to the giver's capacity, not the merit of the performance.

5. Rehearsed eloquence; usual manner of speaking.

6. The speaker of the Prologue is ready.

7. The humor of Quince's speech rests in its mispunctuation; repunctuated, it becomes a typical courteous address.

8. Bother about niceties; heed punctuation marks.

9. How to rein the colt to a stop; punctuation mark.

1. A woodwind instrument resembling a flute.

2. Elizabethan plays were often prefaced by a "dumb show" in which the actors silently mimed the main action, occasionally to the accompaniment (as here) of a narrator. The artisans may enact the story as Quince tells it, merely adopt symbolic attitudes, or introduce themselves.

QUINCE [*as Prologue*] Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show,
 But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
 This man is Pyramus, if you would know;
 This beauteous lady Thisbe is, certain.
 130 This man with lime and roughcast doth present
 Wall, that vile wall which did these lovers sunder;
 And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
 To whisper; at the which let no man wonder.
 This man, with lantern, dog, and bush of thorn,
 135 Presenteth Moonshine. For if you will know,
 By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn³
 To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
 This grizzly beast, which 'Lion' hight⁴ by name,
 The trusty Thisbe coming first by night
 140 Did scare away, or rather did affright;
 And as she fled, her mantle she did fall,⁵
 Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
 Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,⁶
 And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain;
 145 Whereat with blade—with bloody, blameful blade—
 He bravely broached⁷ his boiling bloody breast;
 And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,
 His dagger drew and died. For all the rest,
 Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain
 150 At large⁸ discourse, while here they do remain.
Exeunt all [the clowns] but [SNOUT as] Wall
 THESEUS I wonder if the lion be to speak.
 DEMETRIUS No wonder, my lord—one lion may when many
 asses do.
 SNOUT [*as Wall*] In this same interlude⁹ it doth befall
 155 That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;
 And such a wall as I would have you think
 That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
 Through which the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe
 Did whisper often, very secretly.
 160 This loam, this roughcast, and this stone doth show
 That I am that same wall; the truth is so.
 And this the cranny is, right and sinister,³
 Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.
 THESEUS Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?
 165 DEMETRIUS It is the wittiest partition⁴ that ever I heard dis-
 course, my lord.
Enter [BOTTOM as] Pyramus
 THESEUS Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence.
 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] O grim-looking⁵ night, O night with hue
 so black,
 O night which ever art when day is not;
 170 O night, O night, alack, alack, alack,
 I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot.
 And thou, O wall, O sweet O lovely wall,
 That stand'st between her father's ground and mine,
 Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,

3. Left, running horizontally. Or on the one side (Pyra-
 mus's) and the other (Thisbe's).

4. Wall; formal term for part of an oration.

175 Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne.
[Wall shows his chink]
 Thanks, courteous wall. Jove shield thee well for this.
 But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
 O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss,
 Cursed be thy stones⁵ for thus deceiving me.
 180 THESEUS The wall methinks, being sensible,⁶ should curse
 again.
 BOTTOM [*to THESEUS*] No, in truth, sir, he should not. 'Deceiv-
 ing me' is Thisbe's cue. She is to enter now, and I am to spy
 her through the wall. You shall see, it will fall pat⁷ as I told you.
Enter [FLUTE as] Thisbe
 185 Yonder she comes.
 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans
 For parting my fair Pyramus and me.
 My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones,
 Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.
 190 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] I see a voice. Now will I to the chink
 To spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face.
 'Thisbe?
 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] My love—thou art my love, I think.
 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's
 grace⁸
 And like Lemander⁶ am I trusty still.
 195 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] And I like Helen,⁷ till the fates me kill.
 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] Not Shaphalus to Procrus⁸ was so true.
 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] As Shaphalus to Procrus, I to you.
 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall.
 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.
 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me
 200 straightway?
 FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] Tide⁹ life, tide death, I come without delay.
[Exeunt BOTTOM and FLUTE severally]
 SNOUT [*as Wall*] Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;
 And being done, thus Wall away doth go. *Exit*
 THESEUS Now is the wall down between the two neighbours.
 205 DEMETRIUS No remedy, my lord, when walls are so wilful to⁹
 hear without warning.
 HIPPOLYTA This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.
 THESEUS The best in this kind are but shadows,¹ and the worst
 are no worse if imagination amend them.
 210 HIPPOLYTA It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs.
 THESEUS If we imagine no worse of them than they of them-
 selves, they may pass for excellent men. Here come two noble
 beasts in: a man and a lion.
Enter [SNUG as] Lion, [and STARVELING as] Moonshine
[with a lantern, thorn bush, and dog]
 SNUG [*as Lion*] You, ladies, you whose gentle hearts do fear

capable of feeling
back

precisely

gracious lover

Betide; come

as to

5. Punning on "testicles."

6. Blunder for "Leander," who drowned while swimming
 across the Hellespont to meet his lover, Hero.

7. Helen of Troy was notoriously untrustworthy; a blun-
 der for "Hero."

8. Blunders for "Cephalus" and "Procris." Procris was in

fact seduced by her husband in disguise as another man;
 he later accidentally killed her.

9. Informing the parents. *hear*: proverbially, "walls have
 ears."

1. Mere likenesses without substance. *kind*: profession
 (that is, actors).

215 The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Then know that I as Snug the joiner am
A lion fell,² nor else no lion's dam.
220 For if I should as Lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.
THESEUS A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience.
DEMETRIUS The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.
LYSANDER This lion is a very fox³ for his valour.
225 THESEUS True, and a goose⁴ for his discretion.
DEMETRIUS Not so, my lord, for his valour cannot carry his discretion, and the fox carries the goose.
THESEUS His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour, for the goose carries not the fox. It is well. Leave it to his discretion, and let us listen to the moon.
230 STARVELING [*as Moonshine*] This lantern doth the hornèd⁵ moon present.
DEMETRIUS He should have worn the horns on his head.⁵
THESEUS He is no crescent,⁶ and his horns are invisible within the circumference.
235 STARVELING [*as Moonshine*] This lantern doth the hornèd moon present. Myself the man i'th' moon do seem to be.
THESEUS This is the greatest error of all the rest—the man should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man i'th' moon?
240 DEMETRIUS He dares not come there for⁷ the candle; for you see it is already in snuff.⁶
HIPPOLYTA I am aweary of this moon. Would he would change.
THESEUS It appears by his small light of discretion that he is in the wane; but yet in courtesy, in all reason, we must stay the time.
245 LYSANDER Proceed, Moon.
STARVELING All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon, I the man i'th' moon, this thorn bush my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.
250 DEMETRIUS Why, all these should be in the lantern, for all these are in the moon. But silence; here comes Thisbe.
Enter [FLUTE as] Thisbe
FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?
SNUG [*as Lion*] O.
Lion roars. Thisbe [drops her mantle and] runs off
DEMETRIUS Well roared, Lion.
255 THESEUS Well run, Thisbe.
HIPPOLYTA Well shone, Moon. — Truly, the moon shines with a good grace.
[Lion worries Thisbe's mantle]
THESEUS Well moused,⁷ Lion.
DEMETRIUS And then came Pyramus.
Enter [BOTTOM as] Pyramus
260 LYSANDER And so the lion vanished. *[Exit Lion]*

BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.

I thank thee, moon, for shining now so bright;
For by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams
I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight.

265 But stay, O spite!
But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole⁸ is here?

Eyes, do you see?

How can it be?

270 O dainty duck, O dear!

Thy mantle good,

What, stained with blood?

Approach, ye furies fell.

O fates,⁸ come, come,

275 Cut thread and thrum,⁹

Quail,⁹ crush, conclude, and quell.⁹

THESEUS This passion—and¹ the death of a dear friend—would go near to make a man look sad.

HIPPOLYTA Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.

280 BOTTOM [*as Pyramus*] O wherefore, nature, didst thou lions frame,

Since lion vile hath here deflowered² my dear? —

Which is—no, no, which *was*—the fairest dame

That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked, with cheer.

Come tears, confound;

285 Out sword, and wound

The pap¹⁰ of Pyramus.

Ay, that left pap,

Where heart doth hop.

Thus die I: thus, thus, thus.

[He stabs himself]

290 Now am I dead,

Now am I fled,

My soul is in the sky.

Tongue, lose thy light;

Moon, take thy flight.

[Exit Moonshine]

295 Now die, die, die, die.

[He dies]

DEMETRIUS No die but an ace for him; for he is but one.³

LYSANDER Less than an ace, man; for he is dead; he is nothing.

THESEUS With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover and prove an ass.

300 HIPPOLYTA How chance Moonshine is gone before Thisbe comes back and finds her lover.

THESEUS She will find him by starlight.

Enter [FLUTE as] Thisbe

Here she comes, and her passion¹⁰ ends the play.

passionate speech

305 HIPPOLYTA Methinks she should not use a long one for such a Pyramus. I hope she will be brief.

DEMETRIUS A mote¹¹ will turn the balance which Pyramus, which⁴ Thisbe, is the better—he for a man, God warrant us;

grief

Overpower / kill

crescent

waxing moon

for fear of

breast

2. Fierce; or skin (punning on Snug's costume).
3. Symbolic of low cunning, rather than courage.
4. Symbolic of foolishness.

5. The symbol of a cuckold.
6. In need of snuffing; angry.
7. The mantle is like a mouse in the mouth of a cat.

8. The three Fates in Greek mythology spun and cut the thread of a person's life.
9. A technical term from Bottom's occupation: the tufted end of a weaver's warp, or set of yarns placed lengthwise in a loom when the woven fabric is cut.
10. Only if combined with *passion*: suffering; extravagant speech.

speech.
2. Ruined (but commonly suggesting "deprived of her virginity"); his error for "devoured."
3. Pun on "die" as one of a pair of dice. *one*: the ace, or lowest throw.
4. *which . . . which*: whether . . . or.

she for a woman, God bless us.

LYSANDER She hath spied him already with those sweet eyes.

310 DEMETRIUS And thus she means, videlicet:⁵

FLUTE [*as Thisbe*] Asleep, my love?

What, dead, my dove?

O Pyramus, arise.

Speak, speak. Quite dumb?

315 Dead, dead? A tomb

Must cover thy sweet eyes.

These lily lips,

This cherry nose,

These yellow cowslip cheeks

320 Are gone, are gone.

Lovers, make moan.

His eyes were green as leeks.

O sisters three,⁶

Come, come to me.

325 With hands as pale as milk.

Lay them in gore,

Since you have shore⁷

With shears his thread of silk.

Tongue, not a word.

330 Come, trusty sword,

Come, blade, my breast imbrue.⁸

[*She stabs herself*]

And farewell friends,

Thus Thisbe ends.

Adieu, adieu, adieu.

[*She dies*]

335 THESEUS Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

DEMETRIUS Ay, and Wall too.

BOTTOM⁶ No, I assure you, the wall is down that parted their fathers. Will it please you to see the epilogue or to hear a bergamask dance⁷ between two of our company?

340 THESEUS No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all dead there need none to be blamed. Marry, if he that writ it had played Pyramus and hanged himself in Thisbe's garter it would have been a fine tragedy; and so it is, truly, and very notably discharged. But come, your bergamask. Let your epilogue alone.

345 [BOTTOM and FLUTE⁸ dance a bergamask, then exeunt]

The iron tongue of midnight hath told⁹ twelve.

Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.

I fear we shall outsleep the coming morn

As much as we this night have overwatched.⁹

350 This palpable-gross⁹ play hath well beguiled

The heavy⁹ gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.

A fortnight hold we this solemnity

In nightly revels and new jollity.

Exeunt

5.2

Enter Puck [ROBIN GOODFELLOW, with a broom]

5. As follows. *means*: moans; lodges a formal legal complaint.

6. Spoken by Snug, the Lion, in Q.

7. A dance named after Bergamo, in Italy (commonly rid-

iculed for its rusticity).

8. The only "two of our company" onstage at the end of the play.

ROBIN

Now the hungry lion roars,

And the wolf howls the moon,

Whilst the heavy¹⁰ ploughman snores,

All with weary task fordone.¹⁰

Now the wasted brands¹⁰ do glow

Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,

Puts the wretch that lies in woe

In remembrance of a shroud.

Now it is the time of night

That the graves, all gaping wide,

Every one lets forth his sprite¹¹

In the churchway paths to glide,

And we fairies that do run

By the triple Hecate's¹² team

From the presence of the sun,

Following darkness like a dream,

Now are frolic.¹² Not a mouse

Shall disturb this hallowed house.

I am sent with broom¹³ before

To sweep the dust behind¹³ the door.

Enter [OBERON and TITANIA,] King and Queen of Fairies, with all their train

OBERON Through the house give glimmering light.

By the dead and drowsy fire

Every elf and fairy sprite

Hop as light as bird from brier,

And this ditty after me

Sing, and dance it trippingly.

TITANIA First rehearse your song by rote,

To each word a warbling note.

Hand in hand with fairy grace

Will we sing and bless this place.

The song.¹⁴ [*The fairies dance*]

OBERON Now until the break of day

Through this house each fairy stray.

To the best bride bed will we,¹⁵

Which by us shall blessed be,

And the issue there create¹⁶

Ever shall be fortunate.

So shall all the couples three

Ever true in loving be,

And the blots of nature's hand

Shall not in their issue stand.

Never mole, harelip, nor scar,

Nor mark prodigious¹⁷ such as are

Despised in nativity

Shall upon their children be.

With this field-dew consecrate¹⁸

Every fairy take his gait¹⁸

5.2 Location: Theseus's palace.

1. Each grave lets forth its ghost.

2. Hecate was goddess of the moon and night, and had three realms: heaven (as Cynthia), earth (as Diana), and hell (as Proserpine).

3. One of his traditional emblems; he helped good housekeepers and punished lazy ones.

4. F does not assign lines 31–52 to Oberon. They are indented and printed in italics as "The Song."

5. Oberon and Titania will bless the bed of Theseus and Hippolyta.

6. Consecrated, blessed. Playfully alludes to traditional Catholic custom of blessing the bride bed with holy water.

weary

"done in," exhausted
burned-out logs

merry

from behind

the Fates

shorn

stain with blood

counted; tolled

stayed awake too late

palpably crude

drowsy; slow

created, conceived

ominous birthmark

way

And each several^o chamber bless
Through this palace with sweet peace;
And the owner of it blessed
Ever shall in safety rest.
Trip away, make no stay,
Meet me all by break of day.

Exeunt [all but ROBIN]

Epilogue

ROBIN If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but^o a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend:
And as I am an honest puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to^o scape the serpent's tongue,¹
We will make amends ere long,
Else the puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands,^o if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

Additional Passage

An unusual quantity and kind of mislineation in Q1 has persuaded most scholars that the text at the beginning of 5.1 was revised, with new material written in the margins. The Oxford editors here offer a reconstruction of the passage as originally drafted, which can be compared with 5.1.1–86 of the edited text.

5.1

Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, and PHILOSTRATE

HIPPOLYTA 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

THESEUS More strange than true. I never may believe

These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

Lovers and mad men have such seething brains.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:

That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.

Such tricks hath strong imagination

That if it would but apprehend some joy

It comprehends some bringer of that joy;

Or in the night, imagining some fear,

How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA But all the story of the night told over,

And all their minds transfigured so together,

More witnesseth than fancy's images,

And grows to something of great constancy;

But howsoever, strange and admirable.

Epilogue

1. Hissing from the audience.

Enter the lovers: LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HERMIA, and

HELENA

THESEUS Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.

Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have

To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?

Call Philostrate.

PHILOSTRATE Here mighty Theseus.

THESEUS Say, what abridgement have you for this evening?

What masque, what music? How shall we beguile

The lazy time if not with some delight?

PHILOSTRATE There is a brief how many sports are ripe.

Make choice of which your highness will see first.

THESEUS 'The battle with the centaurs to be sung

'By an Athenian eunuch to the harp.'

We'll none of that. That have I told my love

In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

'The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals

Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage.'

That is an old device, and it was played

When I from Thebes came last a conquerer.

PHILOSTRATE The thrice-three Muses mourning for the death

Of learning, late deceased in beggary.'

That is some satire, keen and critical,

Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.

'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisby.' 'Tedious' and 'brief'?

PHILOSTRATE A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,

Which is as 'brief' as I have known a play;

But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,

Which makes it 'tedious'; for in all the play

There is not one word apt, one player fitted.

THESEUS What are they that do play it?

PHILOSTRATE Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,

Which never laboured in their minds till now,

And now have toiled their unbreathed memories

With this same play against your nuptial.

THESEUS Go, bring them in; and take your places, ladies.

Exit PHILOSTRATE

HIPPOLYTA I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged

And duty in his service perishing.

TEXTUAL VARIANTS

Control text: Q1

F: The Folio of 1623

Q1: The Quarto of 1600

Q2: The Quarto of 1619

Title: A Midsummer Night's Dream [Q1 title page, head title] A mydsomer nighte dreame [Stationers' Register] A Midsommer nightes dream [Q1 running titles]

s.p. THESEUS [Q's use of *Theseus* and *Duke* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. HIPPOLYTA [Q's use of *Hippolyta* and *Duchess* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. BOTTOM [Q's use of *Bottom*, *Pyramus*, and *Clown* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. FLUTE [Q's use of *Flute* and *Thisbe* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. ROBIN [Q's use of *Robin* and *Puck* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. QUINCE [Q's use of *Quince* and *Prologue* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. SNOUT [Q's use of *Snout* and *Wall* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. SNUG [Q's use of *Snug* and *Lion* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. TITANIA [Q's use of *Titania* and *Queen* has been standardized throughout.]

s.p. STARVELING [Q's use of *Starveling* and *Moonshine* has been standardized throughout.]

- 1.1.4 wanes [Q2, F] waucs 10 New Now 24 Stand forth Demetrius. [Q italicizes and centers on a separate line.] 26 Stand forth Lysander. [Q italicizes and centers on a separate line.] 27 This This man 136 low loue 139 merit else, it 159–60 And . . . son. / From . . . leagues. From . . . leagues? / And . . . sonne: 191 I'd ile 200 Helen Helena 212 sleights flights 219 stranger companies strange companions
- 1.2.20 stones stormes 64 s.p. ALL THE REST All.
- 2.1.7 moonēs Moons 58 make room roome 61 Fairies Fairy 78 Perigouna Perigenia 79 Aegles Eagles 101 cheer heere 109 thin chinne 158 the [not in Q] 190 slay . . . slayeth stay . . . stayeth 201 nor [F] not 206 lose loose
- 2.2.9 s.p. FIRST FAIRY [not in Q] 13 s.p. CHORUS [not in Q] 25–30 Sing . . . with lullaby. &c. 31–32 Hence . . . sentinel [indented as part of the song] 44–45 comfort . . . Be it [Q2, F] comfor . . . Bet it 49 good [Q2, F] god 53 is [Q2, F] it
- 3.1.44 s.p. SNOUT Sn. 59 and or 71 Odours, odours. [F] Odours, odorous 76 s.p. ROBIN Puck. [F] Quin(ce). 82 bristly brisky 133 own [Q2, F] owe 144 Mote Moth 145 s.p. A FAIRY . . . ANOTHER . . . ANOTHER . . . ANOTHER . . . All Four Fairies 148 apricots Apricocks 157 s.p. A FAIRY I. Fai. 157–58 mortal. / ANOTHER Hail. mortall, haile 159–60 s.p. ANOTHER . . . ANOTHER 2. Fai . . . 3. Fai. 170 you of you 182 love's louers
- 3.2.19 mimic [F] Minnick 80 so [not in Q] 85 sleep slippe 137 s.p. HELENA [not in Q] 165 here heare 202 is all quite forgot is all forgot 214 like life 221 passionate [F; not in Q] 251 prayers praise 258 No, no, sir [F] No, no yield heele 280 doubt of doubt 300 gentlemen [Q2, F] gentleman 327 but [Q2, F] hut 387 exiled exile
- 3.3.14 shalt [Q2, F] shat 37 to [not in Q]
- 4.1.19 courtesy curtsie 21–22 Pease- / Blossom Cobwebbe 33 thee off thee 38 all ways alwaies 52 flow'rets flouriets 70 o'er or 79 these five these, fine 93 nightēs nights 102 vanguard vaward 114 Seemed Seeme 125 this is [Q2, F] this 170 in sickness a sicknesse 188 found [Q2, F] fonnd 189 It [F] Are you sure / That we are awake? It 195 let us [Q2, F] lets 201 t'expound expound 203–4 a patched fool [F] patcht a foole 208 ballad Ballet
- 4.2.3 s.p. STARVELING [F] Flut(e). 26 no [F] not
- 5.1.34 our [F] Or 38 Egeus [F] Philostrate 38, 42, 61, 72, 76, 106 s.p. EGEUS [F]

Philostrate 44 s.p. LYSANDER [F] The(seus). 46, 50, 54, 58 s.p. THESEUS [F; not in Q] 48, 52, 56 s.p. LYSANDER [F; not in Q] 59 strange black strange 189 up in thee [F] now againe 204 wall Moon down [F] used 263 gleams beames 299 prove [Q2, F] yet prooue 306 mote moth 307 warrant warnd 337 s.p. BOTTOM [F] Lyon.

5.2.1 lion Lyons 2 behowls beholds 13 we wee 49–50 And . . . blessed / Ever . . . rest. Euer . . . rest, / And . . . blest.